

LOVER OF LIFE

By Zsolt de Harsanyi

THE STAR-GAZER

THROUGH A WOMAN'S EYES

LOVER OF LIFE

ZSOLT DE HARSANYI

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TRANSLATED FROM THE HUNGARIAN

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IN COLLABORATION WITH
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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

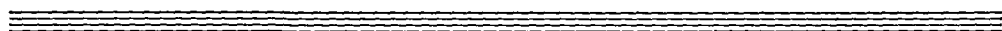
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BOOK ONE



I

His brother was still asleep. Philips had no need to get up early, he had a fine life: at the age of fourteen he had become a gentleman clerk, a law apprentice in the office of Privy Councilor Richardot. His mother had been going the round of her old acquaintances ever since her return. The old acquaintances had been rather lukewarm, but the priests, to show their interest in a reconverted Catholic, had given effective help.

Philips was full of his own importance. When he came home for lunch, he was the proud and care-laden man of affairs, exhausted by weighty labors.

The fourteen-year-old clerk slept on in the dark. His brother slipped out of bed, felt for the flint lying on the stool, and lit the lamp. A soft, yellow circle of light appeared, its edges dimmed. At the same moment the door opened. His mother entered with a jacket in her hand.

"Blessed be the name of Jesus. Slip into this, son, it's very cold today. Hurry up."

Pieter put on the jacket, felt with his toes for his slippers, and hurried after his mother. He walked without hesitation across a pitch-dark room in which he could hear Blandine's steady breathing.

In the kitchen he found the washbasin filled with steaming hot water. He took off his jacket, fastened his nightshirt round his middle, and bent over the basin. His mother proceeded to wash his face. With a soapy hand and a rough rag she scrubbed him thoroughly, following the daily rite to its ruthless conclusion by cleaning his ears with her soapy fingers. Then she changed the hot water for cold. Pieter splashed his face in it with such loud snorts of pleasure, dancing on his naked feet, that his mother scolded him laughingly:

"You'll wake Blandine, you little fiend—and she slaving till dawn over her stitchwork, poor girl! We want to sell the embroidery today."

Pieter restrained himself; driven by the cold, he dressed quickly. While he slipped into his clothes, his mother made ready for him a pitcher of warm milk, some cheese, and a piece of bread. The boy ate greedily, not thinking of his food—he was not interested in quality, only in quantity.

He was thinking of school, of the morning filled with terrific interest which he was going to spend there. He adored school, here, even more than in Cologne.

He hurried across the courtyard in his thick coat, his fur cap on his head, his books under his arm. Klooster Straat was still dark when he stepped out of the gate. Under his feet the snow glittered fresh and white; there had been a fall overnight. He walked quickly along the familiar path, glancing ahead to see whether Balthasar was waiting for him in front of the Plantin house. Yes, Balthasar was there, stamping in the snow. Every morning they walked to school together. They greeted each other with a laugh. Balthasar was a well-to-do boy, son of the publisher and printer, grandson of the famous Plantin who had come from Touraine to Antwerp, and who had ended as a rich man, after starting as a poor bookbinder's apprentice. Balthasar was one of the richest pupils at the school. But not the cleverest. His brain worked slowly, he digested his lessons with difficulty; but all that he learned he retained. He was three years Pieter's senior, but still in Pieter's class. Otherwise he was a strong, red-cheeked, good-natured lad, not very handsome, but healthy and good-tempered. Pieter had a brain that worked with lightning speed, and he was also a remarkably attractive boy, with his fine, regular features framed by his golden hair. The older boy treated the younger with a sort of respectful and affectionate humility.

The school was not far away; Master Verdonck Rombout, the old schoolmaster, held his classes in a building behind the Church of Our Lady. The students had to attend mass before starting their lessons. The school was never heated; the children sat in their overcoats the whole day long, stamping their feet and blowing on their hands.

First came the Bible lesson, taken by a young Jesuit. Today he described the massacre of the children in Bethlehem. The Jesuit brought everything to life in an extraordinary way; he walked with the Roman soldiers from house to house and described each atrocity in detail. He told how they kicked open the door and seized the young mother nursing her child; two soldiers pinioned her arms, the third tore the baby from its mother's breast, the fourth ran his sword through its tiny body; then the third soldier flung the little corpse into a corner so that its skull thudded against the stone floor. The soldiers proceeded to another house; here they found a terrified family huddled in a corner of the room and

The soldiers rushed toward them, their armor clanking, kicked the bigger children out of the way, and struck down the father; one soldier caught up the baby and held it up, while another cut off its head with a single stroke. Outside the house they found a mother running away with her baby in her arms; she stumbled and fell. A soldier spitted the baby's neck with his lance, almost nailing it to the ground, so that when he pulled back the lance the little corpse stuck to the point. Along with the other children Pieter listened in deep silence, his heart wildly beating. He felt angry and sick; and on the point of vomiting. He imagined himself a baby in the arms of his mother, saw the sharp sword approaching his breast, and involuntarily covered his heart with his hands. By the time the Jesuit had finished, Pieter felt physically exhausted. The priest then went on to describe the horrible tortures those soldiers were now suffering in hell along with their master, Herod, while the murdered infants, in heaven, gazed into the Face of God; the Virgin Mother played with them while they listened to marvelous music. But Pieter was hardly able to attend; his mind was still filled with the horrible pictures the priest had called up. And he still felt sick, as he always did at the thought of bloodshed.

The lesson ended; the Jesuit was replaced by old Verdonck Rombout. This time the subject was mythology. Rombout walked up and down to keep warm. He stamped his feet and waved his arms. The last time he had talked about Tantalus, the Greek king who had stolen nectar and ambrosia from the table of the gods and had been so severely punished for it. He had to stand in water up to his chin, while tempting fruit dangled above his head, only to be jerked away when he stretched out his hand for it; the water vanished when he bent down to drink; and so he suffered eternal hunger and thirst. Pieter had thought much about Tantalus since yesterday. What if Tantalus were to snatch a lovely bunch of grapes with a sudden dart of his hand? Or if he were to bend down quite suddenly to drink? It was no use: the bunch of grapes would vanish with the same lightning speed, the water would disappear before he could reach it. Tantalus went on suffering in the boy's imagination. . . .

Today the lesson was about Tantalus's family and especially his daughter Niobe. This Niobe married Amphion, the King of Thebes, Rombout explained. For a long time they lived happily together and had many chil-

dren—seven boys and seven girls. Niobe was very proud of her fine children. Her pride grew until her incessant boasting became unbearable. She met the second wife of Zeus, Leto, and could not keep from bragging even in front of her. She cried: "What are you, after all—you who have only one son, Apollo, and only one daughter, Artemis!" Leto went home, cut to the quick, and told her children. Apollo and Artemis set out at once to punish Niobe. They filled their quivers with arrows and were soon at the foot of Mount Sipylus, where Niobe usually walked with her fourteen children. When she saw them, Niobe saw the danger and at once tried to escape with her children. But in vain. Apollo and Artemis, who never missed their target, slew the fourteen children before their mother's eyes. Niobe was paralyzed by grief; the divine Avengers turned her to stone and placed her on the top of the mountain to serve as an eternal warning against excessive pride.

Pieter listened to this story with the same fascinated interest as he had listened to that of the Massacre of the Innocents. Again cruelty, death, bloodshed. He felt a violent love of life within him—and anger. He also felt relief at the thought of the Latin lesson to come; he knew that it would not be about bloodshed and death. They were reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; today they would have the story of Philemon and Baucis.

He knew the story well; he had read every one of Ovid's poems—at least every one his mother allowed him to read. He loved these stories; they gave him much more pleasure than the curious stories of the old servant maid. Today's story was one of his favorites. He loved the kind old couple who lived in poverty in their poor hut and whom Zeus turned into trees, whose branches were entwined and whose roots embraced for all eternity.

Pieter knew the text, he could have recited most of it by heart; there was no need for him to pay attention to the efforts of the other boys as they plowed laboriously through the confused and difficult construction of Ovid's hexameters. He thought of his parents. He was always brooding over the events at Siegen. He called up the image of his adored mother. He did not know a nobler or kinder being. And, when he recalled his father, his heart was warmed too. His father had been a handsome man, upstanding and likable. Why had they been struck down by such misfortune? Why could they not have lived together forever like Philemon and Baucis?

"It isn't Baucis," Rombout was shouting at someone. "It's Baukis—a Greek word. K, you silly boy, K! Not C!"

Pieter looked up but then returned to his own thoughts. He remembered how his father had told him and Philips one night:

"Children, your mother is a saint. But your father isn't a nobody either. I am an able and honest man, mark my words. I have only one fault: I'm too conscious of the beauty of life."

So his father had said and emptied the glass on the table before him. His mother had gone up and taken away both the glass and the decanter of wine. His father reached after it, but had stopped halfway and smiled a little shamefacedly. His eyes had been a little glassy. Why did he remember now, after so many years, that phrase of his father—"the beauty of life"? He felt dimly that to enjoy and love life too much was to carry the seeds of some dangerous wickedness—and that for some strange reason the main cause of the trouble between his parents had been the fact that his father loved life too much. What then should one do? Turn toward death? No, no, he protested violently, and loathsome thoughts of destruction, physical pain, bloodshed rose in his mind again. He felt that the right attitude was somewhere between these two. And with his scant knowledge of life he felt that the man who wanted to live rightly must find that middle way—it was a most important task.

He noticed that his companions were all on their feet. He jumped up, alarmed. He saw now that they had a visitor: Rombout was bowing and scraping to a gaunt, white-haired Jesuit. He had never seen the old priest before. He must be a dignitary of high rank who had come to supervise their studies. The Jesuit, after asking the boys to sit down and exchanging a few words with their master, turned toward the class.

"Well, let's see how much you know. Who is the brightest boy among you?"

Pieter got to his feet. The old Jesuit smiled.

"Are you the cleverest? What's your name?"

"Pieter Paul Rubens."

Verdonck Rombout shook his head.

"Why do you rise in answer to such a question? I don't approve of immodesty."

Pieter blushed.

"I beg your pardon, sir. But I rose in obedience, not in immodesty."

"Well, seeing you are so clever, tell me, what is meant by chiasmus?" the old Jesuit said with a smile.

"We use the chiastic construction," Pieter replied at once, "when we invert the word order by putting two parallel expressions in opposing sequence side by side. For instance: 'Walking people, sledges running.' If we write these underneath each other and draw a line from verb to verb and from noun to noun, we form the letter X, called in the Greek chi. Therefore this construction is called chiasmus."

"A very good answer," the priest said, becoming serious. "But how did you come to think of that example? Did you learn it?"

"No, Reverend Father. I saw it in the streets; it's winter now."

"Excellent. I see you have a pair of eyes in your head. And you seem to know Latin well. Do you know any other language?"

"Yes, Reverend Father. I know Flemish, German, Latin, Greek, Spanish, Italian, French, and English."

"You speak eight languages? How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

"Where and when did you learn all this?"

"I learned Flemish from my parents. I know German because I was born in Germany. Latin and Greek I learned in Cologne, at school. My father taught me Italian, as he had spent a long time in Rome. He taught me French, too. I learned Spanish from a young monk. I took private lessons in English at school, because the Dean noticed that I had a talent for languages."

"Excellent. You speak eight languages. How do you say in French: 'I am not blind.'?"

"Je ne suis pas aveugle."

"Quite right. And can you tell me what kind of a word this '*aveugle*' is? For in Latin it's '*caecus*,' isn't it? Where did the French take the word from?"

"My father told me about that, Reverend Father. If someone was blinded under the old penal code, they said of him: '*privatus ab oculaes*.' '*Ab oculaes*' turned into '*aveugle*.'"

The old Jesuit fell silent. He gazed at the boy a long time, then glanced at Rombout. His eyes returned to the boy.

"Sit down," he said at last. "I'm going to keep an eye on you."

He began to talk in whispers with Rombout. It was a long talk. Then

the visitor turned back to the class; apparently he had no more interest in Pieter. Pieter sat quite still. Finally the old man said good-by to Rombout, and the boys got to their feet and sang out in unison:

"Laudetur Jesus Christus!"

"In aeternum, amen!" the old man replied.

He stopped in the door and cast a searching glance at Pieter. Then the door closed behind him. Rombout turned to the class, announcing that school was over for today; the Reverend Father had granted them a half holiday. The children rushed from the benches noisily, Pieter among them. As he said good-by to the teacher, Rombout put his hand on his head.

"You really cannot learn much more here."

The boy went out. Praise always made him happy and proud. But a sudden thought struck him to the heart; he stopped in the stone-flagged corridor. What did Rombout's word "really" mean? There was only one explanation. Rombout must have talked to someone about him; probably that old Jesuit. He knew that there was great anxiety at home on account of their poverty, and that his mother would like to see him earning his living. Would he have to leave school now and get some sort of job like his brother? The possibility filled him with horror. Would he have to stop all these lessons which gave him such enormous interest and pleasure? He was still standing lost in anxious thought when the bell rang and the children rushed noisily from the other classrooms, Balthasar Moretus among them.

"We have an hour free till lunch," Balthasar said. "Will you come to the Scheldt for a slide?"

"Oh yes, I'll come. But we ought to take Nicolaas along."

"Of course. Look, there he is, he has just come out. He is looking this way."

Little Nicolaas Liemaecker, a shabby, thin-faced boy, was still in the lowest class, as he had just turned eleven; but the two bigger boys protected him, for he admired Pieter with a doglike devotion. When the two boys walked toward him, his face became radiant.

"You come along with us for a slide," Pieter said in a patronizing tone.

"Oh, thank you," the boy cried, jumping around them with delight. They walked quickly toward the Scheldt. While they had been at their lessons, it had begun to snow harder; thick flakes were drifting down.

They rubbed their noses, laughing, for the flakes tickled them. Few people were about. When they turned into the street leading to the quay, they met a Spanish soldier escorting a fettered prisoner. He was a ragged, miserable-looking fellow, probably a thief or a Protestant. But the boys paid no attention to him—they were so eager to see the frozen Scheldt.

The scene lay before them in white magnificence: the quay with the snow piled knee-high, the river which had frozen over since yesterday. There was a large crowd of children on the ice. Some of them were sliding, others had brought skates although it was difficult to use them in the thick snow. The three friends joined in. They queued up and, taking a good start, glided along the strip of ice polished to a glassy smoothness, keeping their balance with flailing arms. But, when the clock on the tower struck a quarter to twelve, Pieter nodded to his friends.

"You can stay if you want—but I must be home at noon for dinner. Then I'll read till four—we're having supper early."

The others would have liked to stay, but they did not want to leave Pieter; they knew it was no use trying to make him stay. They started home together.

"When I grow up," Balthasar said, flushed and panting, "I'll have a slide ten fathoms long in my yard. My servants will pour water on it every evening and sweep it clear every morning."

"What are you going to be?" Nicolaas asked.

"What do you think? A printer, of course. I'll manage my father's printing works and publish books. But only interesting ones."

"What about you?" Nicolaas asked Pieter.

"I'm going to be a scholar. I'll study law like Philips and get some high state position. And what about you, youngster?"

The small boy hung his head and blushed.

"I want to be a painter. I love pictures more than anything else. The black and white ones in the books—but the colored ones in the churches even more."

"Oh, I often draw myself," Pieter said. "I have copied most of the pictures from our Bible. I am just doing Judith and Holophernes."

"There's nothing I'd like better than to draw and paint," Nicolaas continued. "I'll paint the finest pictures in Antwerp."

"We all hope so," Pieter replied as he glanced at Balthasar. "I hope you'll be a rich man yet."

"Yes, yes," Nicolaas said excitedly. "I want to be very rich. Memling was a painter, too. So was Massijs. But I never want to leave you, all the same."

They soon reached the Plantin house, where Balthasar lived in his grandfather's "palace." The other two walked on. They came to Pieter's house, and little Liemaecker said good-by. Pieter rushed into the kitchen in high spirits.

"Jesus be praised!" he said loudly.

"For ever and ever," the widow replied. "What has happened at school?"

Pieter told of his great triumph. But suddenly he grew moody.

"Mother, Rombout told me that I really couldn't learn much more at his school. Why did he say 'really'?"

"Because we have talked about it, my son."

"You want to take me away from school?" Pieter asked, startled that his suspicions seemed to have been true.

"I'll tell you everything—come inside. Philips may be here any moment, and dinner is almost ready. . . . I'll tell you about our plans during the meal."

Pieter restrained his impatience. Blandine laid the table. A little later Philips arrived. They sat down to eat. His mother began:

"You remember Countess Lalaing, who visited your father in Cologne?"

Only Blandine remembered her clearly, although the two boys had heard of her.

"This lady has a sister-in-law in Oudenaarde. I thought, Pieter, it would do you good to be sent to some great mansion to acquire manners. I asked Countess Anthon Lalaing to write to her sister-in-law in Oudenaarde. Today I received her reply. For a year you're going to be a page."

"And leave school?" Pieter asked, his lips trembling.

"But, my child, Rombout himself said that you couldn't learn much there now."

"And law? What about law?"

"You can study it when you come back. But you must acquire a polish, the manner of the great world. I shall be sad to part with you for a year, but we can't bear our own burdens here any longer."

"Yes, I understand," Pieter replied obediently. "And when shall I leave?"

"I'll have your things ready by next week. You may go to school until then."

Pieter asked no more questions. After lunch he went to his room and cried bitterly. Crying made him tired, and he fell asleep. Blandine woke him for supper.

"How silly you are! You should be delirious with joy!" Philips said. "I'd jump at such a chance. What books they must have in the library?"

"Books?" The boy showed some interest.

"Of course. And horses to ride! And the pages are taught fencing!" These remarks seemed to sink into Pieter's mind.

"Well," he said hesitatingly, "the books and horses—that would be splendid. There's only one thing I would like, Mother."

"What?"

"To take Nicolaas with me. He hasn't anybody here. And he is very attached to me."

His mother nodded. "I'll try."

Pieter turned to Philips. He asked with great interest:

"What books do they have? Tell me, historical?"

"I'm sure they have at least a hundred."

Pieter ate silently, lost in thought.

II

The Countess told her pages to get ready; she was to leave the palace in Oudenaarde for Schoorisse. There would be more room there for the wedding guests. The wedding would take place in four weeks. The pages bowed politely and left the room.

Little Nicolaas jumped about in high spirits. When he glanced at Pieter, he was startled. He saw his friend's grief and was ashamed not to have thought of it. He asked in a conscience-stricken voice:

"Are you coming to the stables? You said you were going for a ride with the grooms."

"No, I'm not coming. Leave me now."

Nicolaas looked at him, hesitated, but then went off obediently. Pieter stared absently out of the window, and waited for the door to close behind his fellow page. Then he started out himself, but in a different direction. He had a hiding place in the castle. Nobody ever visited the small alcove in the armory. Old, disused furniture was kept in it, including a shabby Turkish divan. If he wanted to think or read undisturbed, Pieter usually went there. Now he slipped into the alcove, stretched himself out on the divan, and gave free vent to his sorrow. And to intensify it still more, he relived in his thoughts all that had happened to him since he had become a page.

He remembered the first day. The two boys faced Countess Lalaing in their shabby Sunday clothes; she looked at them with amiable condescension, asked them a few indulgent questions, and then referred them to the steward of the household, who would instruct them in their duties. They turned to go, when the two daughters of the Countess entered; they had just returned from a ride and wanted to see the new pages. The Countess presented the two boys. Pieter felt a lump rising in his throat. He had never before seen anyone as beautiful as the older girl. She was tall and full-bosomed, with a dazzling white skin; her delicate face was framed by reddish-brown hair; the green velvet of the riding habit fitted close on her hips. The steward motioned to them and led them from the

room. He delivered a long lecture on the daily routine of the castle, conducted them along the wide corridors, showed them their room which they were to share with four other pages, introduced them to these four boys, and talked, talked all the time. Pieter listened in a daze. The vision still hovered before him: the tall, slim girl in green, with her skirt pinned up on one side, her hair a little loosened over her white forehead by the ride.

That evening he saw her again. The etiquette at meals was very strict. The old Countess sat at the head of the table, her daughters, Marguerite and Chrétienne, on her left and right; the lackeys presented the silver dishes with great ceremony while the six pages stood along the wall. They were forbidden to move or speak. The four older pages were visibly bored by their monotonous duty. But not the two new ones. Pieter gazed as if bewitched at the girl sitting on her mother's right hand. Now she was wearing a light blue gown with some white decoration. Her luxuriant reddish hair was no longer hidden by a hat. She ate gaily, laughing at her mother's sallies. Pieter could not take his eyes from her. He repeated to himself: "So this is love."

Sleepless nights followed. His overheated brain invented countless stories. He faced the Duke of Farnese and offered him his services, was sent into battle, and achieved unsurpassable feats, whereupon the King of Spain made him a Count. Then the young victorious general called on Countess Lalaing and said:

"Madame, now I am worthy at last of Countess Marguerite's hand." He caught sight of the young Countess on a runaway horse, immediately jumped on another, and, by his presence of mind, saved the girl's life and won her love as his reward.

Later these fantastic imaginings vanished from his mind. Marguerite spoke to him just as she spoke to the others; but she paid more attention to him than to the others. In a week he had won first place with her among the pages.

Then he began to experience the terrible pangs of jealousy. One morning a stylish young man arrived at the castle with great pomp: it was Count Florent de Berlemont. The family greeted him with enthusiasm: the young Count evidently had a good reason for his visit. Pieter told the steward that he was ill and went to bed. But before dinner he had changed his mind; he must see them sitting side by side at the table,

Count Florent and Countess Marguerite, gazing at each other, laughing together. And he had ample opportunity to do so. He felt giddy with misery as he stood by the wall. After dinner he reported again that he was ill and went to bed. Until suppertime he tossed in bed; then he got up again to torture himself with the sight of the lovers.

Count Berlemont left, and Pieter's sufferings were mitigated. Furious jealousy gave way to adoration; he was tossed between the extremes of abject resignation and daring hope. Meanwhile every hour of the day brought some fresh torment. As he helped the Countess into her saddle, he could touch her hand, and was almost overcome with ecstasy. As he sat opposite her in the big carriage, he studied her face, her breasts, her hands resting on her knee. As he helped to lay the table, he would caress secretly the spot which her hand would touch, the back of the Gothic armchair against which her shoulder would rest when she leaned back. When spring came, they moved to Schoorisse, the wonderful island castle; the massive walls were surrounded on all four sides by a moat. There life was even more exciting; he was often allowed to accompany the widowed Countess and her daughters on their walks through the fields. They played in the courtyard, and Countess Marguerite, flushed, would reach for the ball, the folds of her dress clinging to her body, laughing and calling to Chrétienne. She was so beautiful then that to look at her was an unbearable pleasure. The stream of perfect days was sometimes broken by days of exquisite torment: guests arrived, and the pages were removed to a formal distance, especially when Count Berlemont came. It was impossible to ignore any longer that he and the Countess were engaged and only kept it a secret because the year of mourning was not yet over. Count François, the girls' brother, had died at the age of fourteen, leaving the family without an heir. This was a heavy blow for the Lalaings. The recent head of the family, Count Philippe Lalaing, had been governor of Hainault, a gentleman who had felt powerful enough to defy for a long time the Spanish conqueror. Now the young Count François, too, was gone. The widow visited his tomb every day in the chapel; his sisters often wept at some memory of their brother. Then Pieter would look into the tear-filled blue eyes of Countess Marguerite and long to throw himself at her feet in an outburst of compassion and love.

And now all this was ended. A few days more and Count Florent

would wed Countess Marguerite. Pieter stared gloomily at the wall. His helplessness paralyzed him; he imagined himself sentenced to death, struggling with the soldiers who were dragging him to the block; then the executioner waited for him in his red cloak, leaning on the shaft of his ax. If Marguerite married, what meaning could be left in life? Death itself would be a release. He must find some distraction. What was it that interested him most? Drawing? Certainly. At home he had carefully copied all the pictures in the Bible. Even now he loved to sit beside Nicolaas and amuse himself for an hour or so with his pencil. Yes, drawing should be his distraction. He set out to find Nicolaas.

Nicolaas was not in the stables. At last Pieter ran him down in a sunny window of the pages' corridor. Nicolaas was amusing himself with some paint.

"What's this?" Pieter asked. "Where did you get it?"

"The Countess gave it to me."

"When?"

"Just now. You know, she used to paint. I asked her for paint long ago, but she wouldn't give me any. I thought she would be happy about Lady Marguerite's marriage and wouldn't say 'no' this time. She gave me some but told me not to waste it. I was looking for you but couldn't find you anywhere."

"Show me."

Nicolaas stepped aside to let Pieter into the bay window, where he had spread his treasure on the sill. Pieter gazed at the paint greedily; the colors and the brushes were in a small box, divided into compartments. He longed to start at once. He did not know what he would paint, but paint he must. But—what should he paint on? He would need a small, smooth piece of plywood or something like that. He considered the problem.

"Come on," he said suddenly. "Let's go to the Countess."

"What for?"

"Don't ask questions, come along."

He closed the paintbox, put it under his arm, took Nicolaas's hand and dragged him along. He almost ran the length of the corridor till he met a footman. He asked where the Countess was. The footman said that his mistress had just finished her siesta and was working on her embroidery in the alcove of the corner room. The boys went on. They stopped at the

door to get their breath; then Pieter knocked. The Countess was sitting in the alcove.

"What do you want?" she asked kindly.

Pieter bowed low, showed Nicolaas's gift, explained that they wanted to paint and that the drawer of a broken little table in the alcove of the armory would serve their purpose quite well.

"All right, you may have it," the Countess nodded.

The two pages backed into the corridor; then they ran. Pieter found the drawer at once; it had become detached from the table. It might have been created for the express purpose of being used as the panel of a picture.

"Splendid!" Nicolaas cried. "What a good idea! Of course, the Countess would grant you anything. But it's quite true; you're the cleverest of us all."

"Hold on, hold on," Pieter protested. "Don't exaggerate."

"But it's true," said Nicolaas, "and no wonder either. With the blood of a prince in you. . . ."

As soon as he had spoken these words, he stopped in confusion. Pieter looked at him, startled.

"What do you mean? What prince?"

Nicolaas blushed fiery red. Pieter looked at him in astonishment.

"Why don't you answer? Explain at once. What did you mean? Are you making fun of me?"

"I?" the boy cried out in sad reproach.

"Well then, what is it? You're hiding something from me, Nicolaas. You know I'm fond of you. But, if you won't tell me this moment, I'll twist your neck."

"Don't hurt me!" the boy wailed.

"Well then, out with it!"

"You know . . . the others . . . the boys . . . say that . . . that your mother isn't your real mother . . . only you don't know . . . your mother was really the Saxon princess, the wife of the Prince of Orange . . . but she couldn't bring you up because . . . because I don't know why . . . and your father brought you to his wife when you were born . . . don't be angry with me, Pieter, I didn't say all this . . . the boys said it. . . ."

He looked at Pieter with a pleading expression. Pieter stared at him for a long time, then turned away. He gazed into the darkness of the armory.

"All right," Pieter said quietly. "I don't feel like painting now. Take the box—I'll give you the drawer, too. Leave me."

"But you aren't angry?"

"If you go at once, I won't be angry."

Nicolaas took the box and the drawer and hurried out. Pieter stretched himself on the Turkish divan. It was as if the skies had fallen on him and he was not sure yet whether the cataclysm brought him immense happiness or deep misery. What was it that he had heard? According to the gossip of his fellow pages he had been born out of wedlock; he was the child of the Princess of Orange and Jan Rubens, a fugitive from Antwerp. So he must have been born in the Siegen castle; but, as the Prince of Orange refused to endure the bastard, the child had been handed over to the lover. And he, Pieter Paul Rubens, was really an orphan, and the woman in Antwerp was merely his foster mother.

"No! No!" he cried in loud protest and burst out sobbing.

Chance gossip was seeking to rob him of his mother, the person whom he loved most in the whole world. He saw the kind, homely face bending with gentle affection over him. Lying on the divan, he stretched out his arms convulsively as if he wanted to embrace that vision. Suddenly he felt a violent hatred for the Saxon Princess whom he had never seen. No, no, it *mustn't* be true that she was his mother. He tossed on the divan in inward torture. As he grew a little calmer, he tried to marshal his thoughts. When he was born, his elder brother and sister were no longer young. Could it be possible that they had never noticed the substitution? And, if they had, must they not have betrayed it some time during all these years? He racked his brain, going over the same arguments endlessly. Suddenly he realized that it was quite dark. He felt alarmed; he had neglected his duties at the afternoon meal. He hurried to find Nicolaas; he met him in the pages' room and led him into a hidden corner of the corridor.

"Listen. What you told me can't be true. I could swear it isn't true. If you hear it again, you must deny it with all your might."

"Very well. You aren't angry with me?"

"No. I'm fond of you. But you must deny it. You must swear on your oath that it isn't true. I'll tell you something, Nicolaas. You know my secret, how I feel about Countess Marguerite. If I were the son of the Princess, I could venture to think about her, couldn't I? But I would have

to lose my mother. I've decided not to think any more about the Countess. I'm writing to Mother this very day, asking her to fetch me home. I want to become a painter."

Nicolaas's face lit up. He was on the point of bursting out enthusiastically, but both boys suddenly stiffened: the steward had appeared.

"I'm looking for you, Pieter; I have news for you. Our mistress has received word that your mother is coming to visit you. You are excused your duties for tomorrow. As you don't feel well, you needn't attend a supper tonight."

After the steward had gone, Pieter hugged Nicolaas joyfully.

"My mother's coming! My mother's coming! You'll see. I told you it was impossible."

That night he could hardly sleep for excitement. He rose at dawn, dressed, and went to the gate to wait for his mother. He had to wait almost till noon. A rickety peasant cart stopped in front of the palace, and Mrs. Rubens, the former Maria Pypelinck, climbed out a little awkwardly. Pieter rushed into her arms, sobbing. And, as they embraced, all his dark thoughts vanished.

Mrs. Rubens was at once received by the Countess. After that she was at liberty to be with her son until the evening.

"You've made me happy, son. The Countess talked about you in a way that made my heart swell with pride. I'm proud of you, Pieter. What pity your poor father didn't live to see it. These lovely clothes . . . let me look at you."

"Mother, I'd like to get rid of them. Take me home."

His mother was shocked. They argued for a long time. In the end Pieter had to yield; he was to stay for the agreed period of his training. Then they talked for hours about home. All the time Pieter was tortured by the one question; he longed to put it to his mother yet could not. At last—just before they parted—he took his heart into his hands.

"Mother, I'd like to ask you something. I'm a big boy now, you know."

"Ask any question you like, my dear."

"Mother, I have been told about . . . father and the Princess of Orange. . . ."

He suddenly stopped. He saw the look on his mother's face.

"Don't talk about that, my son. Your father was the kindest, best man you must keep his memory sacred."

"Yes, Mother," he said, humbled and shamed. But after a moment's hesitation he continued: "Tell me just one thing, Mother. . . . The . . . the Princess . . . she had a baby, hadn't she?. . . What happened to it?"

"It died," his mother replied calmly. "Died very young. But, if you love your father's memory, you'll never speak of this again."

As they kissed at parting, Pieter felt that he had never loved his mother more. The creaking cart set out. Next day the usual routine was resumed. Early in the morning the steward glanced into the pages' room.

"The Countesses are going for a ride. Two pages needed. Whose turn is it?"

Pieter said to Nicolaas:

"You can take my place. I shall paint all morning."

III

His mother decided that Pieter should not study under Van Veen but at the studio of Master Verhaecht. The boy had pleaded a long time, but he could offer no cogent reason why he should go to Otto van Veen. On the other hand young Verhaecht was distant kinsman of the Pypelinck family.

"One painter is just like another, my son. And I prefer to send you to a relative."

The mother would not give way. Pieter was used to obedience. He resigned himself to spending his apprenticeship with kinsman Verhaecht. But, when he was alone, he felt like crying. And he thought with envy of Nicolaas, who had left the service of Countess Lalaing at the same time as himself, to become Van Veen's pupil. The two pages had dreamed in Oudenaarde of working in the same studio. But their dream came to nothing. When Pieter told him of his mother's decision, Nicolaas had cried.

"Do you know what makes me most sorry?" Nicolaas sniffed.

"No, what?"

"That I didn't steal the picture I painted of you from the Countess. At least I would have some souvenir of our times together."

Pieter shrugged his shoulders. It did not matter now. But he, too, remembered the picture with an aching heart. Nicolaas had painted his portrait in the castle. Nicolaas had offered his work as a respectful gift to the Countess, who had praised it, but had added that she was especially glad that the memory of her favorite page had been left with her in such a permanent form. But the Countess Marguerite had married.

"I'm sorry, too," he said politely. "It was a very fine picture."

He had said this at least a hundred times; Nicolaas could never have enough praise. But then they became sad again. They promised faithfully to meet every Sunday—"As long as we live." And they would go to Italy together.

Leaving home was even more painful. The apprentice had to live in

the house of his master, for this was the custom. His mother was sad when he went.

"Your sister married, you going away—only Philips remains with me now. Oh Lord, the days when we were all together. . . ."

On the day appointed, Mrs. Rubens herself escorted her son to the house of her kinsman. Verhaecht lived not very far from their house. He gave them a rather cold welcome; he was not pleased with the boy, being afraid that he would expect preferential treatment. Work was going on at a great rate in the studio; four boys stared up curiously at the new-comer. Verhaecht hinted that he was very busy.

"I leave the apple of my eye in your hands, Tobias," the mother said. "Be kind to him. It doesn't matter if you're strict—but be just."

"All right, Maria, all right, just leave him to me."

And he turned to the apprentices in the same breath:

"What are you gaping at? Attend to your own business. To work, to work!"

Mother and son embraced.

"Don't make such a fuss, Maria. If he behaves himself, your son won't come to any harm."

There was a trace of irritation in his voice. Mother and son said good-by. Mrs. Rubens turned, flung a fleeting glance of farewell at the painter and almost ran from the studio. Pieter looked at his master and waited for his orders.

"You can unpack later. Have you brought working clothes?"

"Yes."

"All right. You can put them on tomorrow. Don't bother now. Take one of those boards and sit down beside Frans; he'll show you how to plane it."

Pieter silently obeyed. Frans showed him how to hold the plane. He set to work. As he planed, he glanced around surreptitiously at his master to see what he was doing. Verhaecht was a bony, fair-haired man of about twenty-five. The rough-hewn face, the long, straight nose, the wide, thick lips, the short hair parted in the middle, the clumsy hands and feet, gave him the look of a hobbledehoy. He was painting a landscape, which was still in its first stages; on one side of the canvas the outline of a rocky mountain slope could be discerned. One of the apprentices was pounding paint in a mortar, another nailing together a frame of thin lathes, the

third mixing some red, oily substance on a marble slab, the fourth planing. For a long time no one spoke. The master went on painting, but the apprentices paid no attention.

"Are you getting on with your work?" Verhaecht asked Pieter after a long pause.

"Yes, Uncle Tobias," Pieter replied. "I think I'm getting the hang of it."

"Don't be too cocksure."

There was another long silence. Then the painter said:

"Someone open the window."

His command was carried out, and another silence followed. It lasted the whole morning. Whenever an apprentice finished his job, Verhaecht gave him a new one to do. Now and then a dirty old woman shuffled through the studio; she seemed to be Verhaecht's servant or housekeeper—or she may have been his mother. At the sound of the noon bells the master at once laid down his brush. The apprentices followed suit. Verhaecht left the studio without a word, and the old woman carried in a big bowl of steaming soup, put it on the floor, distributed five slices of rye bread and five wooden spoons among the apprentices, and then shuffled out. The boys fell to at once and turned their attention toward Pieter. He bowed, as he had been taught at Oudenaarde, introduced himself, and sat down to eat. The boys exchanged a quick glance and giggled. They clearly regarded Pieter as a fop.

"Does he teach us painting in the afternoon?" Pieter asked.

The others explained in a supercilious tone that they would not be allowed to paint at all until the master had finished the picture. Then they would all copy it.

"And where do we sleep?"

Paillasses were brought in in the evening, he was told, and laid against the wall, along with pillows and blankets.

"Are there no cupboards?"

They laughed. Cupboards? What for? They kept their few personal belongings in the corridor. Pieter, after eating his share of the soup, went outside to have a look. As he entered the studio again, the master came in through the other door. He said: "I'm going to rest now. Frans will look after you."

He disappeared. The apprentices returned to their jobs. Pieter went on planing. Frans showed him a finished panel. It was as smooth as a mirror.

Pieter tried to attain the same perfection. The boys started to talk. Most of what they said was utter nonsense, rough chaff accompanied by loud laughter. Pieter was left out of it by the others. At three o'clock the master reappeared and started on his landscape again. At last dusk began to fall. Verhaecht laid down his brush.

"That's enough for today," he said. "Pieter, show me your work."

Pieter jumped up and showed him the smoothly polished piece of wood. Verhaecht ran it over with his fingers.

"Not good enough. You must do better tomorrow. Now you can have your supper. I'm going along to the Luke Guild. Frans, you keep order."

He left the studio. The shuffling old woman—it turned out that she was Verhaecht's aunt, half housekeeper, half servant—carried in a dish of beans with five small pieces of mutton in it. Each boy was given a big slice of bread and a chunk of cheese. Pieter had been excited by the words Verhaecht had dropped on leaving—the Luke Guild. Like the locksmiths, fullers, and cobblers, the painters, too, had their guild; it was named after St. Luke, the patron saint of the Antwerp artists. Nicolaas and he had often talked of the Luke Guild, although they knew little about it. They imagined it as meeting in a wonderful hall; and there famous artists feasted at tables groaning with food, argued about art, and brought their latest paintings along to show one another.

"Has Verhaecht been to Italy?" he asked Frans.

"Of course he has. He's been in Rome and Florence—and in Tyrol, too."

"Where's that? Tyrol?"

"I don't know. Some German town."

"Does he ever talk about it?"

They all started to laugh.

"Of course he does," Frans said. "When he's drunk. You'll hear him yet."

After supper Frans told Pieter that he could unpack his things. He was given a candle, so that he might find his way in the dark corridor. As soon as he untied the blanket in which his things were wrapped, the others gathered round him to take stock of them. Pieter felt embarrassed. He had been used since childhood to have a corner of his own. He unpacked his books. First, his illustrated Bible. Then the history of Flavius Josephus, also illustrated. Then works of Ovid, and five dictiona-

ries—Latin, Greek, German and others. While he was considering where to put all these, he had to listen to the sneering whispers of his fellow apprentices. He could feel their hostility. Somehow or other he got through his unpacking. At the sight of his toothbrush and soap the apprentices grinned broadly. When he returned to the studio, they awkwardly avoided him.

Then they began a game. One of them bent down and shut his eyes. Someone slapped him on the backside, and he had to guess who it was. If he guessed wrong, he had to remain where he was; if he guessed right, his place was taken by the next boy. Pieter watched this rough game for some time. The others took no notice of him whatever. Pieter went into the corridor, fetched his German dictionary, and came back with it. He loved dictionaries. He opened the book near the end of the letter "E" and was soon lost among the enthralling words: "*Eyfer, Eygen, Eygenschaft, Eyle and Eymer.*" It was late when stumbling steps sounded in the courtyard: Verhaecht had come back. When he opened the door, it was apparent that he had been drinking heavily. Pieter secretly hoped that he would stay with them and tell stories about Italy. But the master had either drunk too much or was in a bad temper; he went straight to his room. The boys prepared to go to bed.

Such was the first day; the second, the third, and the fourth, were a repetition of it. The landscape progressed slowly under the master's brush; the apprentices worked away at pounding paint, planing, and other tasks. Pieter watched the progress of the picture with interest. It turned out to be a landscape containing practically every possible feature; on the left a rock, on the right a river, in the middle a plain; woods in the background crowned by a rainbow; a highroad crossed the plain, there were clouds in the sky; at the edge of the plain some classical building or other with pillars. The highroad contained a cart, a horseman, and a pedestrian; there were hunting dogs on the fringe of the woods—and animals everywhere. The apprentices were excited, wondering when the picture would be finished; then they would be allowed to paint at last.

The picture was finished on Saturday afternoon. The boys could not start copying it until Monday. Sunday was free. Pieter woke up before dawn. By five o'clock he got tired of waiting and rose quietly. He went into the deserted courtyard, washed, and began to think of his companions. As the days went by, they had shown their hostility more and

more clearly. None of them brushed their teeth, but they got a great deal of fun out of aping him as he did so. During the monotonous hours in the studio they nagged at him. They would trip him up, pretending it was by accident, and roar with laughter when he measured his length on the floor. They hid small nails in his mattress. They were in league against him. When he had finished dressing and slipped from the studio, his heart felt free at last; he would rush to his mother, see Balthasar in the forenoon and Nicolaas after dinner.

He found his mother awake, but Philips was still deep in sleep.

"Be as quiet as you can," the mother whispered. "Philips mustn't be wakened; he was out late with his friends last night. We are going to Mass. But tell me, dear, how are you? Do they give you decent food? Are you getting ahead with your work?"

While he ate, Pieter told her everything, not forgetting the apprentices. She listened with increasing dejection. Finally, she said:

"I'll go with you tomorrow. I'll ask Tobias to teach these rascals some manners."

Pieter protested. He would sink still lower in their estimation, if they knew he had told on them. He at last got his mother to give up the idea of intervening.

"All right," she said at last. "I won't say anything—yet. And now let's go to church."

They heard Mass at Notre Dame, then went for a walk. His mother began with a sigh:

"It's sad to see our church in this state. I can remember what it looked like when I came here as a small child from the country. Lovely pictures, countless statues, and the church treasures were shown to visitors in the vestry. All gone."

"Where has it gone?"

"The church was ransacked, my boy. That's what war is like. Nothing is sacred to the soldiers, not even the House of God."

"But why is there war, Mother?"

"I don't know, Pieter. Perhaps because men are bad. The stronger attacks the weaker; the weaker defends himself as well as he can. . . ."

Some Spanish soldiers went past with clattering arms. Everybody gave them a wide berth.

"You see them?" the mother said softly. "What have we done to them?"

Nothing. It's only that we Flemings are a handful and they many. Do you remember the stories I told you in Cologne about Antwerp? I thought I would be bringing you back to the lovely place your poor father and I left. And what have we found? Awful misery."

"But why do we tolerate it, Mother? Why don't we chase out the Spaniards? We ought to be like the Romans, or the Greeks. If we had a leader prepared to fight like Leonidas, defying death, we could get rid of them. . . ."

"Don't be silly, Pieter. Heroism is all very well, but what good is it to a dead man?"

"Posterity will keep him alive. Though he dies, his country will live."

"If all the Flemish people are killed, how can Flanders live? It is almost true, in any case. Prince Farnese, the Governor, has issued a decree. According to it, anyone has the right to cultivate an ownerless field and keep the produce . . . and the land need not be returned unless the former owner can prove his title. That is the state we have reached. . . ."

But Pieter shook his head. His fifteen years filled him with an immense longing for some great and heroic feat.

Their walk had taken them to the banks of the Scheldt. The other side of the river stretched in front of them; among green fields rose the star-shaped formidable gray walls of the Spanish fortresses. There were only a few ships on the river. His mother continued her sad musing on the past; she described the former bustling life of the city, the endless forest of masts, the strangely clad foreigners from distant continents, their skin of a different color, the proud display of the luxurious shops along the quay. Her words inflamed the boy's soul.

Later they returned to the city. Pieter walked down to the Moretus House to visit Balthasar. They sat down in the gallery running round the courtyard. Pieter poured out his heart; the Flemings must rise against Spanish oppression. There was no one to unfurl the flag of freedom; it was awful.

"Of course there is," Balthasar protested. "What about the Prince of Orange, the son of William the Silent?"

Pieter had forgotten him. The Prince of Orange was seldom mentioned in his family. Balthasar's words revived his inner struggle, dormant so long. If the impossible was really true and he was the son of the Princess of Saxony, then he was half brother to the Prince of Orange, the youth

whom people expected to raise the standard of freedom . . . whom he ought to love if he loved freedom. . . . And yet he could feel no affection for the House of Orange . . . these people who had persecuted his father. And the standard of freedom was a Protestant standard while he was a Catholic through and through. On the other hand, the Spaniards were fanatical Catholics; had they not introduced the Great Inquisition? The accursed name of the Duke of Alva was closely connected with the Great Inquisition. Where was one to turn in this maze, what was one to believe, whom to follow with full conviction? Balthasar took him later into the printing works; it lay deserted in the sunshine. At other times the room had excited Pieter; the composing frames with the separate compartments of type, the strong smell of printer's ink, the rough galley proofs, the sheets spread to dry, the machinery, all had filled him with delight. But now he found no pleasure in them.

When he got home, he greeted Philips affectionately. Presently he led the talk round to the Spaniards, although he felt disturbed by the possibility that the Prince of Orange might be mentioned. His brother simply laughed at him. When Pieter stuck to his heroic sentiments, Philips became serious.

"Better not to talk such nonsense. We may be denounced; and, while you would get off with a few kicks from the Spanish soldiers, I might get into serious difficulties. So might Mother. The authorities haven't forgotten Father's name, yet. If we were to attract their attention, they might bring it all up again. And now let's talk about something else."

Pieter bowed to his brother's authority. But he was still entrapped in the maze of conflicting beliefs and convictions. He decided to discuss the whole matter with Nicolaas. But, when his friend arrived, all his questions were silenced by the interesting things Nicolaas had to tell. He was now an apprentice in Van Veen's studio. He was bursting with enthusiasm about the wonderful things he was learning there.

"Can you hold the brush in the right way?" he asked.

"I hold it as I've always done," Pieter said shamefacedly. "Up to now there has been no chance to paint at all."

"Oh, I'm painting. I've been given a still life to do. An apple, cheese, and bread. The master is pleased with me. He's a wonderful man. We all love him. And what amazing things he tells us!"

"What, for instance?"

"Yesterday he explained to us that certain colors are fond of one another. Yellow loves blue. Red loves blue and green. Green loves white. All this you must learn from nature; for in nature everything is right."

Pieter listened with wide eyes.

"Is that the way he talks?"

"Yes. And all the time, too. Yesterday he told us about Glycera. Have you heard of her? She was a Greek girl who sold flowers. She made bouquets and wreaths. She knew so much about colors that she discovered ten thousand different arrangements. A painter called Pausias fell madly in love with her and married her. He never painted anything except his wife's bouquets and garlands. And he became a famous artist."

"That's really thrilling. Go on."

"Oh, he told us a thousand other things, but I don't remember them now. He teaches us something all the time and he has lots of exciting stories about the famous painters. There's an apprentice, a boy named Karel—he makes notes every evening of the more interesting things. He has quite a large batch of notes. . . ."

"Can't you remember any of the stories?"

Nicolaas tried hard, but they seemed to have slipped from his mind for the moment. But he remembered some of Van Veen's amusing remarks and jokes. Pieter listened to him avidly. He glanced at his mother, who understood.

"I'm sure," she said, "there's many a thing to be learned even at Verhaecht's."

Pieter did not reply. But after the day of rest he returned to his master's studio as to a prison. And, after thinking all that day of oppression, now, as he opened the door of the studio, he felt that this was the place for rebellion: against the fourfold superiority of the hostile apprentices.

That Monday morning they were all given easels. The master was no longer painting; he strolled from boy to boy, correcting the preliminary sketches they were making. Pieter worked diligently; he made a faultless sketch in carbon. Verhaecht, for the mere sake of seeking some correction, changed the outline of the rocks on the left side, but only spoiled the sketch. Pieter noticed this at once, but said nothing. He was wise enough not to protest against the errors of grownups. But he knew, nevertheless, that there would come a point when he could not keep silent. Meanwhile, he was filled with elation at the thought that at last he was a real ap-

prentice in painting. A canvas was stretched before him on the easel, and he was at liberty to copy—a thing he had done often enough before.

Verhaecht ascribed great importance to the physical elements of the act of painting. He took infinite care over the posture of his pupils while they worked. He had little trouble with the others, whom he had trained already, but he found fault after fault with Pieter. He objected to his stance, pressed back his shoulders, bent his elbow. And he succeeded in getting him into such an unnatural posture that every stroke of the brush demanded a hundred times more than the normal effort. Pieter obeyed each instruction with infinite patience. But all the time he felt that something was wrong.

The storm burst on Thursday, and its origin was not connected with painting. After dinner Verhaecht retired to his customary siesta and entrusted Frans with the supervision of the studio. The apprentices stopped work; Frans declared that they had been progressing too quickly and told them they could rest until the master woke up. Pieter decided to use his unexpected leisure for reading. He went to the corridor to find a book. He saw at once that someone had disturbed his things, that strange fingers had rummaged among the drawings he had brought with him. He glanced at them attentively, and was horrified to see that mustaches and beards disfigured the drawings he had copied from the book of Flavius Josephus. He was filled with violent anger at the barbarism of the stupid joke. Only his fellow apprentices could have done it—budding artists who felt no scruple about ruining careful and painstaking drawings. Behind the apprentices, the tyranny of Master Verhaecht rose like a symbol of the indifference and narrow-mindedness of the Spanish King. His face was chalk-white when he returned to the studio. The four apprentices were giggling and whispering.

"Someone has ruined my drawings," Pieter said trembling, and yet with great self-control. "I know it would be useless to ask you about it, you'd deny having done it. All right. But whoever did it was a dirty, miserable scoundrel."

They fell silent and stared at him. The silence was broken by the sneering voice of Frans:

"Softly, softly, Master Rubens. It wasn't me, but you couldn't know that. Still what if I did it?"

"If you did it, you were a dirty, miserable scoundrel!"

The next moment Frans was upon him. There was a crash, and he felt a violent pain in his jaw. He hit back, almost without knowing it. They fell in a heap on the floor. He knew the others would attack him, too, but he did not care. He bit and kicked and hit round him. A fist crashed into his eye, another on his nose. Kicks and blows rained on him, but his arms whirled like the spokes of a wheel. He felt something hot and sweetish flooding his mouth. Then he suddenly realized that he was standing on his feet, facing Verhaecht. Frans was shouting:

"The rascal insulted us all; we couldn't let that pass."

"He brushes his teeth—and he knows Spanish and Greek," another observed. But Verhaecht commanded silence. Pieter felt blood spurting from his nose and mouth; one eye was closed; his left leg hurt, and he could hardly lift his arms.

"Uncle Tobias," he stammered, "I ask your protection. I came here to work—you must protect me."

The painter boxed his ears.

"Protection, my lad? Here's some protection for you."

Pieter remained calm. He nodded.

"I knew. I couldn't expect anything else from you. You were bound to take their side because you are untalented."

He went up to the landscape of the master and pointed.

"What kind of a tree is that? It has the trunk of a poplar, and the leafage of an oak. There's no such tree in the world: You're a bungler! A bad painter!"

Verhaecht slapped him again and roared:

"Get out! Get out or I'll kill you!"

Pieter went. Blood still spurted from his nose and mouth. But he did not wipe it off. He walked into the street. People stopped and spoke to him, but he remained haughtily silent. His mother greeted him in great alarm. Briefly, he told her everything.

As soon as she had attended to his wounds, she rushed off to Verhaecht. Pieter learned later that she had spoken her mind there and beaten the apprentices. When she returned, she said:

"I've been to Van Veen's studio, Pieter. Unfortunately he has no vacancy—he can't take a single pupil. But I've got you a place at Van Noort's. You can start next week. . . . What is it? Aren't you listening?"

Pieter was not listening. He realized that it would have been better to

strike up a friendship with the four apprentices right at the start. He could have won their good will; it would have cost him only a few words. But he had wanted to be a hero. He was a hero all right, but they had beaten him—he would ache for a week.

“You aren’t listening!” his mother scolded him.

“I am, Mother, really I am. But I was thinking. And I realize that you were right. It’s better to be wise than brave.”

IV

About three years later Pieter was walking along Everdy Straat on his way to Adam van Noort's studio. It was a fine sunny autumn day; girls cast stolen glances at the handsome boy whose beard and mustache were already sprouting. He loved to stare at girls as he fingered his little mustache. He was eighteen, and felt a certain pride in being grown-up—especially as Van Noort's cook, the plump young widow, had chosen him as her secret lover from among the apprentices, all of whom competed for her substantial favors.

But now something more interesting than girls demanded his attention: two Spanish soldiers leading a sturdy young man whose wrists were fastened by a thin chain. Apparently he had resisted arrest, for the two soldiers kept shouting at him and beating him. The prisoner seemed familiar: it was Frans, his former companion in Verhaecht's studio. Pieter stopped involuntarily; their eyes met. Frans recognized him at the same moment and hate distorted his face, coupled with helpless rage that Pieter should witness his humiliation.

"*Vate, vate!*" One of the soldiers shouted at Pieter in Spanish. He walked on silently and then smiled. He remembered his "heroism," the time when he wanted to fight for freedom. If a Spanish soldier had spoken to him in that manner while he was working at Verhaecht's, he would certainly have protested. Now he had reached the point where he no longer took notice of the brutality of power. He had acquired an inward pride which made him able to overlook any slight in silent indifference.

"Have you filed the petition?" his master asked when he entered the studio.

"Yes, but I had to wait a long time; there were many people at the Town Hall."

Pieter wanted to tell about Verhaecht's apprentice and his armed guard, but he saw that he had interrupted a story. His master was sitting among the apprentices, who were having their mid-morning snack; he had his usual large earthenware tankard in front of him. He drank from morn-

ing till night, swallowing beer by the gallon; about mid-day his eyes always began to glisten: he was not drunk, but his talk became a little lively. Pieter sat down, began to eat and waited for Van Noort to continue his tale. The master—a sturdy, tousled man with a thick mustache, a typical Flemish peasant—took a long draught and went on:

“My father was still living when Philip, Charles V’s son, Crown Prince at that time, entered Antwerp in solemn procession. The burghers met him at the city boundaries; one thousand horsemen and four thousand foot escorted him into Antwerp. Everybody had fine clothes and arms at that time. The whole city was beflagged, twenty-five triumphal arches had been erected and an open-air theater. They spent two hundred and sixty thousand florins on it: Antwerp could do that without feeling it at that time. But I’ve seen an even greater sight myself. I was only four, it was in sixty-one, and I still dimly remember the fireworks. Of course, most of it I know by my father’s description. The spectacle was organized by the guild of painters, so there’s good reason for me to talk about it. The guilds of other cities were invited. Antwerp never saw anything like it. The men of Mechli were dressed in red robes with golden seams; their hats were red with red feathers, and so were their stockings. Their boots were black, and they wore gold chains around their necks. They came on horseback, two by two; one file carried burning torches, the next wreaths of flowers, the third torches again, and so on. The Brussels men were in purple gala dresses with white cloaks and metal helmets. My father told me all about it, but I can only remember one or two details.”

“And they were all artists?” one of the apprentices asked.

“Of course they were, you fool. When I’m not too lazy, I’ll try to find for you Guicciardini’s book telling about life here thirty years ago. This Guicciardini visited Antwerp—my father met him. He says in his book that at the time of his visit there were three hundred artists in the city—and only a hundred and seventy bakers. Of course there were all kinds of artists: painters, etchers, sculptors, architects. It was a different world. Everybody was rich, people loved to buy pictures and statues. Now they have scarcely enough money for bread. The devil has run away with our profession.”

Van Noort swore at length to emphasize his words and took another draught. He swore much and liked vulgar phrases. But it was impossible

to be angry with him; he was so natural, straightforward, and good-tempered.

"But to return to our festivals," he continued; "you must know, our guild has always been famous for its talent in organizing them. The Guild of St. Luke took the poets under its wing a hundred years ago. Formerly the poets and singers had formed all sorts of guilds and groups, usually choosing some flower for an emblem. There was a Chamber of Violets, and a Chamber of Foxgloves . . . and many others. Our guild declared one day, 'Painting and Poetry should always walk together,' and united with the best-known Chamber of Poets, the Violets. They chose a common motto: 'Friendship United Us.' So do your best to be made members of the guild; even in this miserable age of ours, it's a pleasure to belong to the Guild of St. Luke. . . . Devil strangle you, what's going on now?"

The last sentence was not addressed to the apprentices but shouted in the direction of the house, from which screams were coming. Van Noort's household was visited by the stork every year. His wife could not keep the children in order; only her husband could do that. Adam van Noort knew how to deal out slaps, but there was no need for that at present. One shout and silence was restored; he returned to his beer and his story.

"Where was I, blockheads?"

"At the misery in Antwerp, master," Pieter said at once. "And it would be nice to know if the world will stay as it is or take a turn for the better."

He gave his master a stealthy glance; he wondered if he could tempt him into politics again. Van Noort did not reply as Pieter continued:

"My brother Jan wrote me from Rome the other day. Things are flourishing there; he has many commissions and is quite decently paid."

"No wonder. He's right at the source. The Pope and the Cardinals—they can afford it. Not even America can harm them. But America harms us—like everything connected with the Spaniards. . . . Shut the door."

Two of the apprentices jumped to do his bidding, as always when he talked about the Spaniards.

"All this American silver pouring into the country has played the devil with our money. You must know, money is something to buy and sell, just like flour. Last year we had a terribly bad rye harvest, but there was plenty of silver. So the rye became dearer and the money cheaper. Six years ago you paid twenty-six gold florins for a ton of rye—this year it cost seventy-three. Don't you see? Our trouble isn't scarcity of money.

Money is plentiful, but you can buy very little with it. Do you really see it? If anyone is just pretending, I'll tan his hide for him. Pieter, do you see it? Don't answer; I know you do, but I bet my last shirt these fools don't understand why money in abundance is an evil thing."

"So America is to blame for everything?"

"Oh, damn America. No. It's the war and the Spaniards. My father used to live here in Antwerp like a prince. Then the Spaniards spoiled everything. They killed most of the Flemings: there were no people left to till the soil, our merchants were ruined, our ships vanished from the oceans. But now it's going to be different. Prince Farnese is dead, God has taken him at last. We abused him often enough, but he was a fine general. One must grant that. This Archduke Ernst they've sent in his place is no good. And who are his men? Spaniards. A fine help they are! Maurice of Orange, our Prince, *he* has Flemish people all about him. Pieter, listen to me! You attach too much importance to good manners. You walk, bow, and scrape as if you were still a page at the Countess's. Do you know why the Prince of Orange is always victorious? Because the haughty Spanish soldiers all behave like noblemen—they think digging fortifications is beneath them. But the Flemish peasant has been used all his life to work. The Prince of Orange erected fortifications in front of his castles and brought up his guns behind them. For the last four years he has been victorious. Since he took Groning last year, we have had every reason to hope. What a leader! May God bless him, wherever he goes! When the Duke of Alva took a town, five minutes later it was burning, the citizens were robbed and killed. But the army of the Prince of Orange is under iron discipline. You can be sure, the Prince will be king of Holland. And then it will be our turn. I tell you, boys, pray every night for the Prince of Orange."

Pieter did not look at his master, but he felt his glance. He knew that the apprentices were also watching him furtively. This always happened when the talk turned to the family of Orange. Gossip was not dead yet. Pieter himself was convinced now that there was no truth in that old story. He clung to his mother with deep affection; and, while in the past he had wearied himself out with vain speculations, nowadays he hardly gave the matter a thought. But there was one point he often considered; if that child born in Siegen were alive, there was a connecting link between himself and the Prince of Orange.

"Let's talk about something else," Van Noort said. "I've had some interesting news from Hoorn. A new kind of ship has been built there. It's nicknamed 'the flute' because it's four times as long as it is broad. It's particularly suitable for shallow water and can get up a great speed. I think these ships will prove very useful. I'll tell you why. . . ."

But he never did. The children's voices began to be heard again in the other room. Mrs. van Noort opened the door. Her broad face was puckered in distress; she said in a tearful voice:

"Adam, I can't do anything with them. And we must talk about the garden."

"Damn their bawling!" the master said, getting up. "Well. . . . I'll tell you tomorrow about the ships. What day is today? Wednesday? Pieter, get on with the work; I'll come back in the afternoon."

Van Noort vanished; next moment they heard him roaring in the other room, and the crying of the children stopped. Pieter, who was now senior apprentice, nodded to the boys to clear the table. Then he collected his books and notes. After lunch on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, it was his task to talk to the apprentices on the great masters of old Flemish art. Van Noort thought it important that his pupils should receive instruction not only in the technique of painting but also in general culture.

The table was soon cleared and carried to a corner of the studio. Pieter sat down in an armchair, with a sketchbook and a lead pencil. The apprentices gathered round him to watch him when he made a sketch to illustrate a point.

"I told you on Monday that we were going to deal with Quinten Massijs today. He was a great painter, one of the greatest in Antwerp. His father was a blacksmith, one of his brothers a furrier. He himself worked in the smithy at first. Then he fell in love. The girl liked him, but she had a suitor already—a painter. Massijs threw away his tools and started to paint although he was past thirty. Soon he surpassed his rival, his pictures sold much better, and his sweetheart married him. Look, here is a portrait of Massijs. I copied it myself from an etching at Moretus."

The boys bent curiously over his shoulder.

"See, what a strange head! How well the long mane of hair suits him. His eyes are deep-set, his face strong and striking. But the most important feature is his forehead which you can visualize easily under the cap. Only men who think a great deal have such foreheads. And look at his

lips. See, the whole expression of the face is dreamy and childish—and yet how wise!”

One of the apprentices said in a wondering voice:

“All this . . . you see in his face?”

“Of course I do. I have observed faces as long as I can remember, and it is your business, too. How can you paint portraits if you don’t study faces carefully? Well, as I was saying, Massijs was a popular painter, he had a house in Huidevetter Straat with a fine garden. Then he bought two more houses in the Schutterhofstraat, which he leased to other people.”

“Three houses!” the same apprentice sighed, as if he were listening to a fairy tale.

“Perhaps you will have three houses, too. Near the end of his life he moved to one of the houses he had once let. You can easily find it still; it has a wrought-iron statue of St. Quentin, who was his patron saint. I think he made the statue himself.”

“Yes, yes,” another apprentice interrupted excitedly. “I know the house. My parents live close to it.”

“Well, Massijs covered the four walls of a room with water colors in the grisaille manner. I have heard that there are men still alive who have seen this room. It was filled with decorative garlands and *putti*.”

The smallest apprentice asked:

“What’s that . . . *putti*?”

“Why, don’t you know that? *Putti* are child nudes. We borrowed the word from the Italians. There were four colored figures on the mantelpiece, all playing the flute. Do you know what material they were made of? You will never guess: none at all. He simply painted them on the wall, but they rose from the grisaille foundation so vividly that you would have sworn they were real statues. He used them to amuse his famous visitors with. He had famous friends like Erasmus of Rotterdam and the English Chancellor, Thomas More. He left two portraits of Erasmus. If you work diligently and succeed in your profession, you, too, may be friends of famous scientists and foreign chancellors. . . .”

The boys shuffled their feet and fidgeted to denote their lively ambitions.

“Look carefully now; this is a copy of Massijs’ most famous masterpiece, the triptych. I saw it first in the guild of carpenters; they ordered it originally. But the other day I visited the church to which it has been

transferred and had another look. Go there on Sunday and tell me about it. But here we have the copy. Look and shiver, for this is a masterpiece."

"What's this triptych?" the youngest apprentice asked again.

"Don't laugh at him, or you'll make him ashamed to ask questions. A 'Triptychon' is a Greek word, it means 'threefold.' You see, this altarpiece is threefold, it has a center and two wings which can be opened and closed. Let's look first at the centerpiece. It depicts the burial of Christ. This picture will teach you a great deal about composition. First in drawing, then in color. The painter has an idea; he is going to paint the mourning for Christ. The single elements of the subject are ready in his mind: the dead Savior is the chief figure, the group of mourners is of secondary interest. This group needs a background. What is the background? Mountains, trees, sky, clouds, distant buildings. The work of composition consists in imagining the people, trees, clouds, rocks as an artistic unity. Look at this picture—and don't forget that its shape is not triangular; on the top it ends with a wavy line. This is the frame in which Massijs imagined his composition. Up here you see the Hill of Golgotha; in the center the empty Cross with the two smaller crosses of the two thieves. The Cross of Christ is the apex of the picture. The whole picture convinces us that the Cross could not have been in any other place. Was it not a marvelous piece of ingenuity to crown the picture with the Cross? It gives us a vertical line like an exclamation mark. But look at the lower part of the picture: the body of Christ is almost horizontal, to underline the significance of the Cross. It is not quite horizontal, but almost; it rises a little to the left. Look, with what wonderful harmony the line of the body is continued in the posture of the figure on the extreme left. And, if you observe the right, you will see the same thing: the line of the body is continued in the gesture of the female figure. The main line of the picture is the lower semicircle from which the vertical line of the Cross rises like a flower from a shell-shaped vase. . . ."

Pieter stopped, his eloquence took refuge in gesture. He described an arc in the air with his right hand as if that single curve could explain the whole picture. Then he continued:

"But notice also the composition of the colors. The background is quiet, but very light. Mark this: the background must be—quiet and peaceful, so that the attention is not drawn from the main group in the foreground, and also because a painting with a light background is live-

lier and more pleasant to the eye. Here, for example, the rocks are light gray, the sky light blue and white. The color of the body is a quiet brown. Above and below, this quiet harmony of hues frames the picture. In between, the painter could safely display his most dazzling colors. Mary's gown is bright blue, her kerchief dazzling white; the figure of John is red; and here we find purple, bronze-green, violet, dark green, dark brown, gold. No two garments are the same color. Everything is brilliant, but not garish. Lovely, lovely, lovely. . . ."

A voice spoke behind the apprentices.

"No faults at all?"

It was the master's voice. No one had noticed that he had entered. They all turned. Pieter rose and calmly replied:

"There are some faults. The perspective is not quite true. But the boys haven't been taught perspective yet."

Van Noort looked with a smile at his favorite pupil. He gave him a good long stare, then he nodded.

"Often I feel you'll turn out to be a great painter. There are a few like you in the younger generation. I don't think there is any need to despair about the future."

He became lost in his thoughts.

"Tell me, do you ever write to your brother in Rome?"

"Oh yes, sir. Whenever my mother writes."

"Well, tell him to give my best regards to young Jan Breughel, who is in Rome now. No doubt they know each other. Breughel studied in Goetkint's studio. He, too, is very talented."

Pieter blushed. The "he, too" made him proud and happy. He bowed politely; it was the smooth and elegant obeisance he had learned as a page. Van Noort grimaced, laughed, and slapped his pupil on the back.

"I wish you weren't so damned urbane!"

V

Nicolaas decided to risk it. The three friends were sitting in a curtained room at the Moretus house, a pleasant and cool refuge. Outside, the heat rose in waves.

"Pieter, you never told me why you left Van Noort's studio. One day you simply told me you were free and asked me to speak to Voenius. Why did you leave?"

Pieter looked alarmed at the boy's first words. Then he glanced at his friend; Balthasar leaned forward eagerly.

"I wanted to ask the same question myself," he said.

Pieter Paul Rubens, a handsome youth of twenty, did not reply for a moment. He smiled, reliving it all in his own mind. He recalled the day when Lina, a country girl related to Van Noort, arrived in Antwerp. She was a lovely girl, tall and shapely; her full bosom strained against her bodice, her chestnut hair framed a perfect forehead, there was an exciting fire in her brown eyes when she glanced at him. Lina decided in the first few days whom she liked best among the apprentices and did not make any secret of her preference. In a fortnight Pieter had reached the point where he had to divide his affections. He continued his affair with the cook, while reserving the dreams of his heart for Lina. But, as the weeks passed, his adoration slowly and irresistibly turned into something very like flesh-and-blood passion. One day when the Van Noort family made an excursion beyond the Scheldt, he and Lina lagged behind the others and kissed for the first time. It was the first kiss he had exchanged with a woman of his own class. They confessed their love. The clandestine embraces of the cook presently irked him. The two women began to be jealous of each other. The Van Noorts' house was filled with quarrels, tears, recriminations: the cook cried and intrigued against Lina, while Lina retaliated by abusing her cooking, and accused her of breaking the crockery and of stealing the petty cash. Pieter did what he could. He broke with the cook and secretly proposed to Lina. Yet he felt he was making a mistake. The girl persecuted the cook with such cunning malice

and revealed such a capacity for hate that he was alarmed. Yet his desire for the girl so possessed him that he tried to drive these faults from his mind. But something happened which shocked him into a realization of the truth. Van Noort went for a two days' trip to Brussels. When he was gone, Lina demanded that Pieter should spend all his time with her. Pieter wanted to work, and they quarreled.

"Be careful, Lina," the young man said. "You'll make me think that you wouldn't let me attend to my work if I married you."

"Do you love me . . . or don't you?" the girl asked reproachfully.

"Of course I do. I'm almost crazy, I love you so much. But my work comes first."

"At last you've admitted it. So your work is more important to you than I am."

"But, dearest, you must realize that a man has work to do. You mustn't take it like that."

"I take it as I feel it. Which do you love the best, me or your painting? If you had to choose, which would you decide for?"

Pieter did not answer at once. At last he shrugged and said grimly:

"I cannot live without art."

"Damn your art. Whoever loves me, must think me the first and only thing in his life."

She turned on her heel and left him. Pieter did not have a chance to speak to her for two days. During that time he did not sleep a wink. He gnashed his teeth and clenched his fists in helpless desire. But at the same time he thought of his future, his work, the home he wanted, where everything would serve the high aims of his art. When Van Noort returned from Brussels, he had come to a decision. He told his master that he was leaving. Van Noort was much surprised. He asked for Pieter's reasons.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you. Private reasons. But I feel infinitely grateful for all I have learned here, and I leave with a sad heart."

While he packed, Lina was crying angrily in her room and the cook howled in the kitchen.

For a week or two he stayed at home with his mother, painted a little, read a little, paid a visit to Brussels to see some pictures; then he began to attend Van Veen's studio. Or rather Vaenius's studio, for his new master loved the classical style and had turned his name into Latin, following

the custom of older generations. Now Pieter's friends wanted to know why he had left his last master. Should he tell them? No, he would not.

"I really don't know myself," he replied indifferently. "I was weary of the old place and wanted a change."

"Do you like your new master?" Balthasar asked.

"Yes. He teaches well, he's a learned man and a good painter. And I'm always glad to meet someone who has good manners. Vaenius is a man with perfect manners."

Nicolaas giggled. Pieter, who knew him well, said:

"I could swear that you have a piece of gossip up your sleeve. What do you know about Vaenius?"

"Something you don't seem to know. I can explain why he has such an air of distraction. You have sharp eyes to have noticed it."

He paused for effect, then continued:

"Our excellent master was born in Leyden. His father, Cornelius van Veen, famous lawyer, was a member of the Spanish party; and, when Holland won its freedom, he had to fly, and settled in Liege. One of his sons became a painter, but before that he was a page, just like you."

"I know. If you thought that was news to me, you're mistaken. Vaenius doesn't show a trace of having been a page—there's nobility in his blood."

"So there is; but you won't listen to me. Do you know who was the father of Cornelius van Veen, the exiled lawyer? Jan III, Duke of Brabant. Yes, he was a bastard of the Duke, so our master is the grandson of the Duke of Brabant. I always say, blood will out."

Pieter made some jesting remark, but he had difficulty in suppressing his excitement. He could feel the blood rising in his face and was glad of the semidarkness. There was something disturbing in the story: Nicolaas, the little tale bearer, had aroused in him again the old dim question of his origin, a question he tried to forget but could not. And in the midst of his excitement he was filled by a strange sympathy: suddenly he felt a great affection for the grandson of the Duke of Brabant. But the next moment he reproached himself angrily: it was mean to value someone higher simply because he was the grandchild of a duke.

"Dreaming, Pieter?" Balthasar suddenly said. He had been speaking for some time.

"Oh no, I have been listening," Pieter said quickly.

But he had not been listening. He was absent-minded all that evening.

After he left, he called at his mother's, embraced her with unusual affection, exchanged a few words with her, and then returned to Vaenius's studio. Next day he observed his master with keen curiosity.

Otto Vaenius did not look much like a descendant of handsome princes and generals. He was a little man of thirty-one, though his full mustache and goatee beard made him look older. The most striking thing about him was the shortness of his legs. But even his badly proportioned body did not rob him of a natural dignity. His manners were modest and urbane. His occasional patrons were ashamed to bargain with him. He consequently earned more money from his pictures than other painters. Nor was he a bad painter. Pieter thought he had talent. His pictures were like the man himself: in good taste, distinguished, though rather dull in artistic content. But Pieter did not try to learn the art of painting from him—he wanted rather to acquire his classical spirit. Vaenius was a surprisingly well-educated man. He spoke Latin and Greek as if they were his mother tongue. He knew the classics through and through, and could produce long quotations at a moment's notice. One had only to quote a sentence from Seneca, and he would go on for half an hour. His favorite authors were Seneca, Plautus, Juvenal, Valerius Maximus, and Homer. He loved to read these authors and illustrate them. Just now he was painting the scene where Horace complained to Posthumus of the flight of time. "*Eheu, fugaces, Postume, Postume labuntur anni. . .*" was to be the title of the painting. The two chief figures sat on a balcony. The background was the white houses of Rome. As soon as he entered the studio, Vaenius started work, and his pupils continued with their own pictures. The apprentices had no pounding of colors or planing of planks to do. They really learned to paint and were better treated even than at Van Noort's. There work went on in silence; Vaenius would let them go on for hours and then give them his criticisms and observations. Often a pupil had to wipe out the work of a whole morning and start afresh.

But Pieter was bored by the silence; he liked to divide his interests. During his years of apprenticeship he had acquired the strange habit of painting while something else was exercising his mind. Usually he sang or whistled. He liked to argue as he worked, or to listen to some interesting story. He tried to make the master talk.

"What are things like in the Netherlands, master? Is there more money there than here, or less?"

"More. Certainly more. They are better traders than the Flemings. They have a man—Linschoten is his name—who knows a great deal about the seas. He just sits in Amsterdam and advises the ships where to sail. Last year he sent four ships to India. They rounded the Cape of Good Hope and steered such a skillful course that the Portuguese couldn't attack them. The Dutch are clever and make a great deal of money. I don't grudge them it. They are heretics. There can be no blessing on Protestant riches. And I'm sure better times are coming for Flanders. His Highness the Archduke Albrecht is a wise and good prince; he will bring prosperity to our country. *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*"

Vaenius was a Catholic, a Spanish partisan, and a firm believer in the divine mission of kings. Whenever he spoke of the Archduke Albrecht, who had succeeded Ernst, his unfortunate brother, as Governor, his words expressed the deepest reverence. When, after Ernst's death, Albrecht, the ex-Cardinal, had entered Antwerp, the city fathers had given Vaenius the task of decorating the city. He did so with great success—although Antwerp was struggling with great financial difficulties.

A visitor interrupted the conversation. It was none other than Verhaecht. The apprentices bowed to him with great respect; Pieter with particular politeness. But even he could not surpass his master's urbane greeting.

"A most welcome guest," Vaenius exclaimed. "Come inside, my dear friend."

"I hope I haven't inconvenienced you by arriving uninvited."

"Oh, no. Many are invited, but you shall be the chosen."

Both of them laughed at the joke as they went into the inner room. The apprentices understood the allusion. The St. Luke Guild was about to choose a new president; competition would be sharp, but most people agreed that the honor would fall to Tobias Verhaecht.

"This is what he does all day and every day," little Nicolaas remarked. "When the head of a studio is against him, he bribes the apprentices to sing his praises. Young Teniers told me that he actually called at his father's shop at Handschoemarkt—although the grocer has nothing to do with the election."

"Teniers?" one of the apprentices said. "Surely he began studying only this year?"

"Verhaecht doesn't mind," Nicolaas shrugged his shoulders. "Of course,

when there is no election he treats the apprentices very differently. Ask Pieter."

"I had about forgotten that I was ever with him," Pieter replied quietly. "But work, boys, instead of chattering. Where is old Adriaan? He ought to have been here long ago."

As if in answer of the question, a shuffling old man entered. His silvery white hair reached to his shoulders, his beard was long and white, and his skull smooth and bald. As soon as he entered, he took up a chair with the air of a man who knew what he was about, carried it to the middle of the room, sat down, and turned his head so as to present his profile. The students fetched their sketchbooks and started to draw—all except Pieter. He went from student to student, advising, approving, explaining. They were hard at work when Verhaecht returned with a shining face.

"Well, boys," he said in a honeyed voice, "working, working?"

Modestly they all remained silent. Verhaecht looked at one or two drawings, praised them warmly, then glanced at Pieter.

"And you? You aren't drawing, my dear cousin?"

"No, sir, I deputize for the master."

"I see. Excellent. Excellent."

He turned to Vaenius.

"Pieter used to work with me. He was sent to me as a dear relative. I was most grieved when he left on account of some misunderstanding—and I am still sorry. But it was all to the good, since it led him to the most distinguished master in Antwerp. And you, Pieter, ought to be grateful for being allowed to work here. But don't be too proud; you ought to remember your relations occasionally. Whenever you have a free hour, come over to me for a talk. No need to be afraid; Frans is no longer with me."

Pieter glanced at his former master.

"I know, sir, that he was caught stealing and put into prison. But I don't think I would be afraid, even if he were still there."

"Oh, so you're still the old fighting cock?"

"No, sir, I never fight. I never knew how to attack people, and I'm afraid I never shall."

Vaenius interposed:

"I can't understand, friend Tobias, why you call Pieter a fighting cock. I never had a more peaceable boy in my studio. And I must congratulate

you; your relative is very talented. You have both probably inherited your talent from some common ancestor."

Pieter bowed low and, before Verhaecht could speak, said:

"That would reflect great honor on me, but unfortunately it is not so. My father had artistic inclinations, but my mother is more of a philosopher. She is wise, patient, calm, kind, and infinitely forbearing. I am sure Master Verhaecht, too, possesses all these qualities."

Tobias Verhaecht stared at him in some confusion. Nicolaas could be heard giggling loudly. Tobias seemed about to say something, but merely stammered a hasty good-by.

"Pieter," Vaenius said, "as far as I know, you and Verhaecht parted on bad terms. He gave you a terrible hiding, didn't he?"

"Yes, master. A terrible hiding."

"Then why did you praise him for his gentleness?"

"It was my revenge, master. Now I have settled my account with him."

Vaenius smiled and shook his head.

"If you weren't resolved to become a painter at all costs, I'd advise you to become a diplomat. Did you want to say something to me?"

"Yes, master. Can I have today off? I have an important appointment."

"Go by all means, my boy. And who is the important appointment? Fair or dark?"

"The color of the hair doesn't matter, master. I am to meet Jan Breughel, who will tell me about Italy."

Vaenius nodded. Pieter first called on his mother, had a long talk with her, and then hurried to Breughel's quarters. They had agreed to go for a walk. Pieter insisted on taking regular exercise.

Breughel greeted him a little shyly. There was something strange in their relationship. Jan Breughel was twenty-nine, Pieter had just turned twenty, but—as often happened in his friendships—he behaved as if he were the elder. His manners were self-assured, his speech rounded and calm, his courtesy impeccable but slightly distant. Breughel, on the other hand, was confused and halting in his speech and clumsy in his movements. He was undeniably ugly; his thick mustache quite hid his mouth; his black beard ended in a curl—while other men twirled their mustaches, Breughel twirled his beard when in deep thought. But his forehead indicated an extraordinary mind and his eyes were fine. When he heard of his return, Pieter had hurried to him; but Breughel would have sought him

out in any case as he had brought greetings from Pieter's brother in Rome. Jan was well; he was making a good living, though he was occasionally troubled by malaria. Pieter had set himself to win Breughel's friendship. Breughel had capitulated at once to the enchanting gaiety and attractive manners of his visitor.

They set out for their walk. Pieter knew that it would not be easy to get much information out of his taciturn friend. Breughel answered every question with much deliberation but had nothing to say on his own account. During previous walks they had talked a great deal about the famous Italian painters: Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Raphael, Paul Veronese. He inquired now about Tintoretto, who had died three years before. Breughel told him everything he knew. He described Tintoretto's appearance, for he had once seen him. He went on to speak of his picture, *Paradise*, which was more than seventy feet by thirty, the biggest painting in the world. Pieter pestered Breughel with innumerable questions; no detail was too insignificant for his curiosity. After a while Breughel said with a shy, apologetic smile:

"I don't know any thing more about the painters; better ask me about the cities."

An avalanche of new questions followed. . . . Rome, Venice, Florence, Milan. The Milan Cathedral seemed to interest the young man most of all. Breughel had to describe every altar in the lovely church. They began to talk of Germany and the Netherlands; on his way home Breughel had spent a long time in these countries. Darkness was beginning to fall when they returned to the door of Breughel's lodgings. They were saying good-by when Pieter asked one last question:

"And what was the most horrible thing you saw among all that beauty?"

Breughel stopped. He twirled his beard, deep in thought.

"An execution I saw in a German town."

"Tell me about it."

Breughel began haltingly, but the story soon made him forget himself.

"I saw it purely by accident. I was wandering aimlessly through the streets of the town when, turning a corner, I saw a crowd. I elbowed my way through it and found myself in a square surrounded by marvelous houses, with an ornamental fountain in the middle. It was a sunny

spring morning, birds were twittering on the trees. Heavily fettered, a soldier was standing beside the fountain; at his side stood a provost and three drummers; behind them a company of musketeers. Along the four sides of the square, lancers were keeping back the crowd. At one side stood six soldiers armed with heavy lances. I arrived just when the rolling of the drums was ceasing; then the provost began to speak in a loud voice. I could make out a little of his German: He was warning the people to keep behind the spearmen—the man who was to be executed might try to escape and lose himself in the crowd. Anyone assisting him would be executed. Then, with the prisoner, he began to walk along the four sides of the square so as to give the man a chance to say good-by to his relatives and friends and beg forgiveness of anyone he might have wronged. They passed quite close to me. I shall never forget that soldier's face. He was pale as death, and he was crying. He looked at no one, but kept staring ahead as he stumbled on. He was trembling from head to foot. They walked round the square. When they got back to the fountain, the provost addressed the prisoner in a loud voice. He asked his forgiveness for sending him to death. His words moved the man so deeply that he began to cry more loudly than ever. Then the provost went up to him and took off his chains. As soon as his arms were free, the man flung himself sobbing into the provost's arms. The provost tried at first to free himself gently; but, when that was of no avail, he became rougher, and finally the two of them seemed to be wrestling. Two soldiers came up at last and dragged the prisoner away by force. He tried to stand up before the provost, but he stumbled and fell to the ground. At this point the six lancers I mentioned formed up in a double line at one side of the square. A man explained to me that if the prisoner managed to dodge past the six men safely he would win his freedom. But this, of course, was practically impossible. He was lying on the ground in a faint. The soldiers kicked him and pricked him with their lances, but he never moved. Then they fetched water from the fountain, poured it over him, and lifted him to his feet. The provost touched the prisoner on the right shoulder three times and said: 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' Then he turned him so as to face the lancers and shouted 'Run!' And the unfortunate man started to run. He shut his eyes as he rushed on the lancers. The soldiers stepped on his body and tugged out their lances. The musketeers fired three salvos, then marched around the body three

times. That still wasn't the end, but I couldn't stand any more. I pushed with my elbows and cleared a path through the crowd. I felt sick. But I can still see the man's body—with the broad brown stain spreading beneath it on the ground. I can still see his face—and I would give a lot to forget it—as he stumbled, sobbing, on the lances."

For a long time they stood in silence before the gate. Pieter touched Breughel's shoulder in silent farewell. He walked away with nervous, quick steps; he felt an unbearable pressure in the pit of his stomach.

"I must be oversqueamish," he thought; "the man may have been some footpad with many lives on his conscience. Yet how many died who have never harmed anyone! A soldier knows that is his profession—he risks his life when he takes his pay. But what of the peaceable people massacred by mercenaries when towns are captured?"

He reached the studio. Lively conversation was going on by the dim candlelight.

"What are you talking about?"

"Our Governor, Archduke Albrecht," Nicolaas replied, "has taken Calais. The news has just arrived."

Pieter shouted:

"Can't you talk of anything but bloodshed, death, and murder?"

While the others stared at him in amazement, he covered his face and tried to compose himself. He went on in a calmer voice:

"What business is it of yours? I . . . Oh, it doesn't matter. Did the work go all right today?"

He finished the sentence in his own mind: I should think you have no cause to be glad if the Spanish beat the French. Aren't you Flemings? Let them kill each other if they are in love with death. I am in love with Flanders and with my work. . . .

VI

Pieter Paul Rubens, master painter, for the past two years a full member of St. Luke's Guild, now a young man of twenty-three with a fair beard and a strikingly handsome face, was sitting in a room in Venice close to the Church of Santa Lucia, writing to his mother. He suddenly smiled at himself. Sometimes he still made a mistake regarding the date; he could not get used to putting a six after the one; his hand was still used to forming the five. And yet it was already July in the year 1600.

He had arrived in Venice a few weeks ago. Before leaving home, he had paid a visit to Louvain to see Philips. His older brother had settled there, following Councilor Richardot; besides instructing the two sons of the councilor in various sciences, he was continuing his legal studies under the famous Lipsius. The two brothers had taken an affectionate farewell. Philips had said again and again that as soon as he could manage he would come to Italy, too. Pieter had returned to Antwerp for his passport. The same day he had said good-by to Blandine and his mother. The presence of his traveling companion had fortunately cut their farewell short. His companion was the nobleman, Deodato del Monte, who had come to Antwerp to settle some complicated family business and was now returning to Italy. Deodato fidgeted with obvious impatience while mother and son dragged out their parting. At last Pieter had to go; only Del Monte's presence restrained him from crying. Mevrouw Rubens tried to compose herself, but at the last moment she whispered into her son's ear:

"I feel it, my dear boy. . . . I shall never see you again."

"I'll be really angry, Mother," he whispered back, "if you talk such nonsense."

He tried to look cheerful, but his heart felt heavy. He stared back a long time at his mother standing at the gate, waving her handkerchief. After he had become a master painter, he had stayed in his mother's house, and for two years they had lived in affectionate intimacy. He had not sold many pictures; he had earned a little money occasionally helping

well-known masters. But poverty had not troubled them. Now he, the last child, had left the nest, and the aging woman was left alone. Yet she had urged him to go. She firmly believed in Pieter's genius.

The travelers had followed the valley of the Rhine. They had passed through Cologne, and Pieter had spent a day there in reviving his childhood memories. He had visited their former house and the monastery where he had gone to school, had called on one or two of his old teachers, had shown his companion little-known art treasures in small churches. From the Rhine Valley they had turned aside to Switzerland, and there Del Monte had become the guide. Pieter was amazed and enchanted by the lovely countryside; when they climbed the passes of the Alps, he had quoted the passage about Hannibal's crossing in Levy. Then they had descended to the Italian plains. The landscape, the costumes of the people, and the language changed; every night he had gone to bed in some wayside inn, confused by the wealth of his impressions.

And now he was in Venice, the Queen of the Adriatic, with her lagoons, her unique architecture, the penetrating smell of sea water and refuse, the melancholy, long-drawn shouts of her gondoliers. An enchanting city, and how wonderful it would be if he could show all this beauty to his mother! His thoughts took him back to the letter he was writing, and he tried to find the affectionate words to comfort the poor, old, lonely woman in Antwerp.

It was early in the morning. Pieter had long been accustomed to rise at dawn. Although in Venice the night life offered him new and exciting experiences, he did not change his habits. According to Del Monte, nowhere in Europe could one find so many women of easy virtue as Venice. At dusk they emerged from the side streets; but by then Pieter was preparing to return to his lodgings. As in Antwerp, he took a light dinner at six and retired at eight. He, who lived by the sun, secretly blamed the easygoing people of Venice, who seemed almost unaware of their churches, palaces, pictures, and statues. He would have liked to rush to these places at five o'clock in the morning to gaze his fill and copy the pictures. But at that early hour they were not open. He accordingly employed his time in writing letters, reading, and swimming. If he wanted to swim, he had only to go to his door, where he slipped off his night dress and dived into the still, cool water of the lagoon. It was not a very private place; he had to dodge orange peel, straw, rotten bits of wood,

even dead cats on occasions; but the vigorous exercise steeled his muscles relaxed by sleep. When he climbed out, he felt refreshed and ready for work.

After his swim he ran upstairs, leaving smaller and smaller wet footprints behind him as he hurried to his room. He dressed carefully; this worried him, for his clothes were too heavy for the heat of Venice. But he preferred to suffer the heat all day rather than dress with unbecoming scantiness. After carefully brushing his hair, mustache, and beard, he sat down to breakfast. He generally bought the food himself the evening before; it consisted mostly of fruit, which he kept in water overnight. He ate a great deal of it. Afterward he spent some moments gargling and cleaning his strong white teeth; then he stepped into the other room, where Deodato was still asleep. Deodato usually returned very late at night and slept heavily in the mornings.

"Leave me alone," he said, opening his eyes when Pieter shook him, and quickly closed them again.

"You told me to wake you early. Have you forgotten that we are going out?"

"Time for that tomorrow. Let me sleep."

"All right. I'll see you in front of the Doge's Palace."

Deodato mumbled something, turned on his other side, and fell asleep again. Pieter returned to his own room, collected his sketching things, and left the house. He knew the city well by now and picked his way without hesitation through a maze of winding thoroughfares, small alleys, and *sottoponti*. He made quickly for the Piazza.

It was still early, and there were hardly any people in the Doge's Palace. Pieter passed through several rooms and passages and stopped in the corner of a large room. A picture by Paul Veronese hung on the wall; underneath it stood an easel, a stool, a box of paints, and other things. He had been given permission to copy this picture and had arranged with one of the attendants to leave his paraphernalia in the place overnight. Meetings were seldom held in this particular room, and Pieter had been told that he could work for five days at least undisturbed. He put his things in order and sat down to paint. There was one quality in the picture which interested him particularly: he set himself to learn from Veronese how to give the brilliance of satin to golden-yellow draperies. Veronese

was a supreme master of this art, and Pieter had cried out in delight on looking at a fold in the skirt of the female figure.

He had been working for over an hour when he heard steps behind him. Someone had entered the room and was standing behind him. He did not look round; the attentions of curious observers annoyed him. But this visitor seemed slow to leave him. At last he spoke:

"Pardon me, sir. But you are, I think, a foreigner," he said in Italian.

Pieter glanced round and saw a well-dressed man apparently in his forties. The stranger bowed.

"That is so, sir," Pieter replied. "I am Flemish."

"Forgive me for talking to you like this, but you seem to know your job extremely well. Which city of Flanders are you from, if I may ask?"

"Antwerp."

The stranger's face lighted up.

"Oh, Antwerp. Do you know there, by any chance, a painter called Pourbus?"

"Certainly. A very good craftsman. Last year the Duke of Mantua visited Antwerp and engaged him as court painter."

"He hasn't arrived yet, however. The Duke himself told me so. I have the honor to be his friend. My name is Alessandro Villani."

Pieter rose and bowed.

"Mine is Pietro Paolo Rubens. I am happy to make your acquaintance, sir."

"And so am I to make yours. I have seldom seen such skill in copying. If you aren't averse to earning a little money, I'd be glad to commission one or two copies."

"It would make me very happy, sir."

A lively conversation began. The Italian knew a great deal about painting. He had dropped into the Doge's Palace to see some of his favorite paintings—an invariable custom with him when he passed through Venice. He was waiting for the Duke of Mantua, who was expected shortly from foreign parts.

"Could you show me some of your other work?"

"Certainly, sir. I'd be very glad to do so. I have lots of pictures at my lodgings. Unfortunately I live rather far from here, near Santa Lucia."

"It doesn't matter. I have a gondola, and my men are strong. If you are agreeable, we can start at once."

Pieter was only too glad to accept the offer. A few minutes later they were standing on the marble flags of the Piazzetta, beneath the twin pillars. At a shout from Villani the gondoliers quickly appeared. They were dressed in red and white uniforms.

"Are these your family colors, sir? I once wore the same."

"Really? How was that?"

"The family colors of the Counts of Lalaing are red and white. And I used to be a page to Countess Lalaing."

"If you don't mind my saying so, your manners suggest it."

They were soon deep in conversation. Villani wanted to show that he was familiar with the world of art; Pieter, to demonstrate that his education and upbringing made him worthy of the society of dukes and princes. Villani spoke enthusiastically of Mantegna. He seemed familiar with his work, and Pieter complimented him on his knowledge.

"There's no special merit in that," Villani replied. "Mantegna spent forty-six years of his life in Mantua. The ducal palace is full of his pictures."

"That must be really exciting."

"If you ever pass through Mantua, you must call on me. I shall show you the art treasures in the palace."

"Thank you, sir. I shall certainly take advantage of your offer. Will you tell me something of your illustrious master?"

Villani replied as if he were speaking of a naughty but lovable child.

"Oh, my master. . . . How shall I describe him? He lives a hundred times more intensely than other men. I once remarked this to him. I told him that other men had only one life—but he had a hundred. He replied that it wasn't enough."

Pieter smiled. "He must be a very interesting person."

It was two polished men of the world who were sitting in the gondola. They concealed their thoughts in the most polite and courtly terms. Pieter's remark, translated into ordinary language, meant: I would like you to present me to your master. Villani smiled faintly, and he replied:

"The paths of life bring unexpected encounters. Perhaps you will meet him some day. But I am really longing to see your pictures."

Which, in plain language, meant: Not so fast, young man. I may present you, but first I want to see whether you really are a good painter.

They exchanged several more sentences in the same veiled language.

"The rulers of men are to be envied," Pieter said. "They have immense wealth and can spend on art as much as they please."

"Indeed yes," Villani replied. "My master spends a great deal, but it is diverted into many channels, and an individual artist can only expect to receive the usual market prices."

The gondoliers, cutting through narrow canals, reached Santa Lucia in a surprisingly short time. Pieter told them where to stop. He led his visitor upstairs.

"Forgive me, sir," he said when he reached his room; "these surroundings I am afraid, are unworthy of you."

"The dwelling place of art is itself an altar," Villani replied courteously. "Show me your pictures."

One by one, Pieter displayed his paintings, which were stacked against the wall. On seeing the first, a picture of the Holy Family, which had been painted in Vaenius's studio, Villani cried out in admiration. On seeing the second, depicting the rape of Europa, he merely nodded in silence. When he saw the third, a study of old Adriaan, he did nothing. The rest he inspected without a word. After he had examined the last one, he rose.

"That is enough, sir. His Highness the Duke arrives in Venice tonight. Tomorrow I shall present you to him. But before that I should like to know you better. Where are you dining today?"

"I have arranged to meet an Italian friend of mine. His name is Deodato del Monte; he's a charming man."

Villani's face became overcast. He had no desire to sit at the same table with any unknown Italian.

"In that case I won't disturb you. I am sorry. In the evening I have to meet the Duke. Well, let us arrange a meeting. Tomorrow at the stroke of nine I shall send the gondola to fetch you. Bring your pictures. Now, if you like, I shall take you back to the Piazza, and we can talk a little more on the way."

They continued to discuss pictures. But there was a slight change in the tone of their conversation. Villani's pronouncements on painters were less self-assured than before. On the other hand, Pieter was even more polite and modest. They parted on the marble steps of Piazzetta with the friendliness of men who are prepared to like each other. At noon Pieter met Deodato and had dinner with him at a small inn on the Riva dei

Schiavoni. Pieter told about his interesting encounter. His friend frowned.

"Don't expect too much, Pietro. Vincenzo Gonzaga is considered the least reliable man in all Italy."

"I can't be disappointed," Pieter replied gaily. "You ought to know me well enough—I only believe in things I can hold in my hand. But it would be splendid if this duke were to buy a picture or two of me. Though I won't be surprised if the gondola doesn't turn up tomorrow."

But at the stroke of nine the gondola appeared. Pieter was glad to see it. He took his pictures and went down the stairs. The gondola did not go far; it stopped at a near-by palace on the Canale Grande. The oarsmen helped him up the steps with great politeness and led him into a narrow side street—here was the service door to the *palazzo*. He entered a marble hall decorated with tapestries, where he was asked to take a chair. A few minutes later Villani arrived.

"I have to ask your pardon, sir. His Highness must go to Murano today to look at some hunting dogs. He asks you to postpone your visit till tomorrow. I hope your plans have not been upset."

"Not at all," Pieter replied. "I shall be here tomorrow. At what hour does the Duke desire me to attend him?"

"The gondola will fetch you in the morning. I am extremely sorry, but my regret is sweetened by the hope that you bear me no grudge for this postponement."

"Not in the least."

They were extremely polite; they bowed and parted. At noon Del Monte listened with amusement to Pieter's report. Next morning there was no gondola. Pieter did not dare to leave his lodgings in case it should come. It arrived at half past eleven instead of nine. In ten minutes Pieter was at the palace. Here he waited with his pictures until a quarter past twelve. Villani appeared with an apologetic face.

"I must ask your pardon in the Duke's name; he thought he would have finished long before this with his astrologers; he forgot the time."

"It doesn't matter. I shall be happy to pay my respects to him now."

"That's just the trouble. The Doge was expecting His Highness at noon, and now it is a quarter past. But he will certainly see you tomorrow. We shall send the gondola."

Next day the gondola did not arrive at all. Instead, a letter came from Villani asking again to be excused and explaining the new delay at some

length by the unexpected visit of a famous actress whom the Duke wished to engage. Signor Pietro Paolo Rubens was asked to be ready next day at half past eight, when the gondola would call for him once more. Pieter obeyed. The gondola arrived on time. In the hall of the palace Villani was waiting for him. His face boded no good.

"I really don't know how to excuse myself, Master Rubens. Up to this very morning the Duke has shown a keen interest in your paintings which I had warmly recommended to his favor. This morning he declared to my great sorrow that he is not interested in them any longer. Let me buy something from you to compensate you for your trouble—I planned to do so originally. But I must ask you to be quick—I have to accompany His Highness to the Lido, where he plans to go riding."

Pieter shook his head. He had already set out his pictures, but now he began to pack them up again.

"Don't buy anything for my sake, sir. If you really want to acquire one of my pictures, please don't hurry. Visit me and take your time."

"No, no, I have about fifteen minutes to spare. His Highness isn't planning to start for another quarter of an hour, and in the meantime. . . ."

He stopped suddenly. A man had entered the room, followed by several others. It was easy to guess that it was Vincenzo I, the ruler of Mantua. A fine figure of a man with clear-cut features and a soft beard, a man of thirty-six or -seven. He made to pass quickly across the hall, but his glance fell on the pictures which Pieter had not yet packed away.

"We must hurry, Villani," he said, but at the same time he stopped before the pictures. He examined them carefully, one after another. Pieter did not wait to be asked to show the others. Finally the Duke exclaimed enthusiastically:

"It's incredible! These are works of genius! Why do you hide such a great artist from me? Are you the painter?"

Pieter bowed silently. Villani stepped forward.

"Your Highness, this is Pietro Paolo Rubens, the Flemish artist of whom I have ventured to speak to you."

"Oh, yes. Is this man free?"

"I am free, Your Highness," Pieter replied.

But the Duke turned away and addressed Villani:

"We must employ him at the court. Arrange matters with him. Now we must go riding."

"Pardon me, Your Highness," Villani said, "but Your Highness has already employed Pourbus as your court painter. He may turn up at any moment. Perhaps we might buy some pictures from Messer Rubens, and then. . . ."

"Don't argue, Villani. I want this man in Mantua. You settle with Pourbus. Come on."

They started at once. Villani had just time to nod ragingly to Pieter. The Duke himself hurried from the hall without looking back. Pieter was left alone. His heart was pounding; something very important had happened to him; in a moment he had become the court painter of the Duke of Mantua; he had become the successor of the great Mantegna. His first thought was of his mother: How happy she would be!

Next morning he called at the palace to discuss with Villani the terms of his employment. But the courtier could not be found. Pieter had to wait till evening to get a few words with his patron.

"The day after tomorrow, the twenty-third, we are starting for Mantua," he said. "Settle up all your affairs, for you are coming with us."

"This knowledge makes me very happy, sir. But you may find it natural if I inquire about the terms of my employment."

"Of course, you want to know your salary. The Duke himself decides such matters; and, if we force his decision, he may become difficult. I advise you to come with us without asking any questions."

"You are right, Messer Villani," Pieter replied after some thought. "I shall travel with you. I only wanted to ask. . . ."

"Don't ask anything. Excuse me. I must go. We leave here at eight in the morning, the day after tomorrow. I shall see you again."

Villani rushed off. Pieter shrugged his shoulders and went home. He was smiling; he liked the eccentricities of the capricious Duke. He wrote a long letter to his mother and settled all his affairs. Then, on a blazing hot July morning, he set out with the retinue of the Duke of Mantua. There were almost twenty in it. Gondolas carried them from Venice to the mainland. There the ducal saddle horses and luggage carts were waiting. They rode off—Pieter in the rear among the servants. When they were long past Mestre, they stopped by a well. The Duke's eyes fell on Pieter.

"Who are you?" he asked in surprise.

"Your new court painter, Your Highness," Pieter replied with a deep bow.

"My new court painter? What court painter?"

Villani interposed:

"Your Highness employed him the day before yesterday in Pourbus's place. His name is Rubens."

The Duke's expression suddenly changed to one of friendliness and pleasure.

"Oh yes, those pictures . . . I remember . . . an excellent artist . . . I am very glad. . . ."

Then he turned his back on Pieter and began to ask Villani whether it was likely to rain.

VII

Jan Rubens had died in Rome. Pieter received the news by roundabout ways. He felt as if he were reading about a stranger. He hardly remembered his brother; even his appearance was only a dim memory. He was sorry to hear the news, but he felt no grief. There were no spiritual roots to nourish sorrow, and the exciting novelty of court life deadened the shock. Wandering from room to room of the palace, he came again and again upon the melancholy device of the *Gonzagas*: "*Nec spe, nec metu.*" "Neither with hope nor with fear." This was the way the *Gonzagas* wished to live, without hope of good, without fear of evil, looking indifferently into the future with the calmness of courage, but without hope. *Nec spe, nec metu.* The ducal palace seemed to exude a fatalist complacency. It was a huge square block, its four corners guarded by jagged towers, its ancient blackened stones charged with a grim dignity. The huge enclosure contained numerous courtyards, jousting grounds, and broad moats which were eminently suitable for mock naval battles; there were labyrinthine wings with an endless sequence of halls and rooms, a maze of corridors, the quarters of the court, stables that could accommodate a hundred and fifty horses, and flower gardens on various levels.

As soon as he arrived, Pieter was given a small attic off the actors' corridor. He and his neighbor, Master Lorenzo, the astrologer, were the only people in this part of the castle who had no connection with the stage. The ducal family was housed so far from this corridor that days passed without Pieter seeing the wife and children of Duke Vincenzo. The Duchess was Vincenzo's second wife; he had first married a Farnese girl, and after she died Eleonora Medici, daughter of Francesco, the ruler of Florence at that time. She was now a woman of thirty-five, quiet, gentle, patient. The courtiers told Pieter that she bore with infinite resignation the wild instability and reckless dissipation of her husband. She lived for her three children and found her only consolation in their well-being. Duke Francesco was fourteen, Ferdinando thirteen, the little Margherita not yet ten. But he saw the Duke often enough, for he would appear now

in this part of the palace, now in that, always in a hurry, always in hasty conversation with someone other than the person he was really looking for. He could have sent for anybody he wanted to see, but it bored him to sit for any length of time in his own apartment. Obsessed by a strange greed, he was always rushing after some fresh object. But every new possession speedily wearied him. It was said that he always sat down to table with an excellent appetite, but as soon as he took the first bite began to fidget absent-mindedly and urged quicker and quicker service. In his anxiety to sample each new dish, sometimes he would give up the hunt just when the quarry was sighted. But the theater could invariably hold his interest; every evening he was to be found in his box, and if he was disturbed there by political affairs he was very angry.

A week passed before Pieter was received by him. The second day after his arrival, however, he was summoned to report to Annibale Chieppio, the ducal secretary. This Chieppio was more than a simple secretary. Villani had told him in advance. He was chief steward, chancellor, keeper of his master's secrets, and guardian of his well-being. When Pieter entered the modest room, he found an elderly rotund gentleman whose face beamed with good will.

"So you are the painter. All right. His Highness wishes you to take a good look at the art treasures of the palace before he receives you; you should study the rooms and become familiar with the special style of the *corte*. I have given orders to the doorkeepers that you are to be admitted everywhere, even to the private rooms of the ducal family when they are unoccupied. Are you satisfied with your quarters?"

"Thank you, sir, they are very comfortable. On the whole I feel very well here—the atmosphere of the palace seems to suit me perfectly."

"Really? What do you like so much about it?"

"The classical atmosphere, sir. Ever since I was a child, I have admired the spirit of ancient Greece and Rome. And now I am not only in Italy, but in a ducal court where the classical spirit is kept alive. I feel very happy here, Messer Chieppio."

"I am glad to hear it. Do they love the classical so much in your country?"

"In Antwerp there is a society called the Romanist Society. It is composed of men who have visited Rome and have come to love Italy as their second home. My late father was a member of it, and I wish noth-

ing better than to become one myself upon my return. But I could spend a hundred years in the room through which I walked on my way here."

"Which room was that?"

"The Camera degli Sposi. At least the footman said so."

"Oh yes, it is very beautiful. The finest work Mantegna ever did, though he spent most of his life with us. You can see from every detail in these paintings the deep, grateful, almost naïve affection he had for our ruling dynasty."

"I shall try to follow his example if I can. I have already discovered that it is not difficult to love His Highness."

Chiappio gave him a searching glance. Then he replied in a somewhat warmer tone:

"Not only is there no difficulty about it—it is impossible not to love him. You may well believe me, for I have served him for a long time, and my duties are not light. He adores beauty and spends money to serve it with both hands—even when he hasn't any left. I shouldn't like to sound disrespectful even in his absence, but I love him as a father loves his spendthrift son."

"Is he a kind man?" Pieter asked boldly.

"Kind almost beyond belief. His connection with Tasso for example. . . . But it's a well-known story."

"Tasso? I don't know the story. I hardly know the name—only that he is a poet."

"He was a poet. He died five years ago. To tell the story briefly, Tasso was a great favorite of the court of Ferrara and fell in love with the two sisters of the Duke D'Este, Lucrezia and Eleonora. I don't know what happened, there were the most contradictory rumors: The Duke locked him up in a madhouse. The poor fellow turned to our Duke for help. Master Vincenzo responded at once. He bombarded the Duke of Ferrara with long letters and sent courtiers to intercede on Tasso's behalf. And all this simply because he had read and enjoyed that fine poem, the *Gerusalemme Liberata*; he could recite whole pages of it by heart. He didn't rest until Tasso was free. It's neither here nor there that, in my opinion, Tasso really was a madman. I think, fundamentally, every artist is mad. . . ."

Pieter interrupted:

"Pardon me, sir, but I don't believe that. There is no need for an artist

to be mad. To plead madness is merely the excuse of the worthless. . . .”

“Have you no follies?”

“None whatsoever, Messer Chieppio. And yet I dare to consider myself an artist.”

Chieppio smiled.

“Both of us may be right. I accept the fact that there is no absolute necessity for the artist to be mad. But you must agree that even a madman may be an artist. Believe me, Tasso, the great poet, behaved impossibly. And yet he was a great artist, and I myself forgave him a great deal because of that.”

Pieter replied somewhat indignantly:

“I don’t expect any forbearance, sir.”

“Make no promises, my son,” the secretary said kindly.

“But I repeat, sir, I know how to govern myself.”

Chieppio became a shade cooler.

“Just as you say. But I may yet remind you of this talk. Now you may start your studies; in a week you are expected to know all about the palace. Then I shall take you to His Highness. In the meantime, if you have any difficulties, come to me.”

“If I am to start at once, I have a request now. I’d like to have a horse.”

“That isn’t a difficult request to fulfill. Go to the Master of the Horse and tell him that I sent you. Good-by.”

After leaving the room, Pieter hesitated whether he should start with the horses or the art treasures. And at last he decided for the stables. They were not easy to find, and once there he found himself in a maze. The stable buildings formed a whole section of the palace: Duke Gonzaga had a hundred and fifty horses. The Master of the Horse occupied a fine office, the walls of which were covered with framed pedigrees. The Master glanced suspiciously at Pietro, but after a few minutes he was reassured: the young man seemed to understand horseflesh. He nodded and led his visitor along the boxes of the first stable. He contented himself at first with short remarks but, finding an intelligent listener, warmed to his subject and launched into a long, enthusiastic harangue. There were all kinds of horses in the stables, huge stallions from Germany, French hunters, long-necked racers from Tuscany, small, fiery Turkish stallions, Hungarian horses specially trained for jousts, Spanish mares taught to dance and prance delicately. His own stud was in a separate

stable; these horses were bred for sale, and buyers came from every country of Europe to see them. Then, in another stable, the Master of the Horse pointed at the long row of horses in their stalls.

"You may choose any of these."

After deep consideration, Pieter selected three for trial. Without the spur he tested them one after another; they had been saddled and led to the sandy paddock in front of the stable. The Master of the Horse watched with an appreciative eye as he tested their paces.

"I want the one in the middle, the black mare."

"You have sharp eyes—Medusa is the best of them. And your seat isn't bad either. What nationality are you?"

"Flemish, sir."

"Excellent. This horse is yours from now on. And I'll try and include you in some hunting parties."

They parted in great amity. Pieter returned tired and happy to the vaulted corridors of the palace. By chance he ran into Villani at a turn of a staircase. Villani offered at once to show him through some of the rooms. They turned into the first room; close to the door there was a very fine picture.

"Perugino," Villani said. "The one opposite there is a Ghirlandaio. Not bad, eh?"

Pieter examined the first picture keenly. Then he stepped across to the second. He scrutinized it with equal care. There was a third, by Masaccio, and a fourth, by Signorelli. Then a Mantegna and a Giulio Romano. Mantegna again. Veronese. A statue dug up by vineyard workers not far from the castle. Tapestries. A collection of coins. And so on.

"I can't go on," Pieter said. "My brain can't take it in. Is there much more?"

Villani laughed.

"I can see you haven't heard of Isabella D'Este. A long time ago she was our Duchess. She had probably the finest appreciation of art of anyone who ever lived in this palace. Nine tenths of what you see here was collected by her. The present Duke is the only one who can compare with her. How much time have you been given to look around?"

"A week."

"Then you'll have to work hard if you want to study everything in detail. A week could be spent in the armory alone. The Duke also coi-

lects *gemmae*. Indeed he collects practically everything. But I hear the bell—go and have your lunch.”

“I’d like to, but I don’t know where to go.”

“I should say in the actors’ corridor. If you turn to the right into a smaller passage it will take you to the door of the dining room.”

Pieter found his way with some difficulty. Around a long table people were eating. They were the members of the Duke’s court theater. A fat, red-nosed old man sat at the head of the table. When the door opened, he shouted to the others:

“*Ecco il fiammingo.*”

Then he rose and hurried across to Pieter, whom he greeted in Latin.

“Thank you, but I speak your language, sir, even if haltingly. Can you find me a place at your table?”

“We have already reserved one for you. I heard of your arrival. No need to introduce yourself, all of us know who you are.”

He pointed to a place near the foot of the table. But before Pieter could sit down he shook his head.

“No, don’t sit there. Come a little nearer. Catarina, move down a bit—and you, too, all of you.”

Pieter found himself between two actresses. On his right was an elderly, full-bosomed lady who probably played mothers and duennas. But his neighbor on the left delighted him. She was a dark-haired woman, young and shapely. Her eyes were almond-shaped and very black; her hair, too, was pitch black, rich and gleaming, a little dark down emphasized the line of her upper lip. The effect was enhanced by her dress, which suited her eyes, her hair, and her face most agreeably.

“What lovely colors you wear, *signorina*,” Pieter said.

“If they please you, I’m satisfied,” the actress replied. “My task is to please.”

She looked into his eyes until he felt himself drifting into another world.

“By daytime, too?” he asked daringly.

“Of course, *fiammingo*. At night I have to please as an actress—by day as a woman. And I couldn’t say which triumph I prize most.”

“Is there a performance tonight?”

“Yes. I am appearing. I hope you’ll be there.”

“Nothing could keep me away. I want to give you a chance of enjoying your triumph both by night and by day.”

Catarina gave him another glance; the others laughed and nodded approvingly. They had accepted Pieter. He turned to his right and began to talk to the elderly actress. Then he drew the others into talk, and at the end of the meal he was as familiar with them as if he had been dining with them every day of his life. As he left, he received another glance from the dark girl, even warmer than the first.

In the afternoon he continued his study of the pictures and statues. He absorbed his new impressions. He questioned everybody he met. The footmen and clerks did not know much, but he pieced together the haphazard information he abstracted from them. The first thing that struck him was the fervor with which all of them acclaimed the superiority of the Court of Mantua, belittling all that had been done for art by the Medicis in Florence, the Estes in Ferrara, the Sforzas in Milan. There was such keen competition between the dynasties that Pieter's practical mind saw in it at once a heaven-sent opportunity for artists. After this discovery he felt in high spirits; and, when, later in the afternoon, he began to tire of the murals and the painted ceilings, he set out for a walk. He passed through the shabby streets of the little town. He accosted passers-by, people lounging at the gates, and overwhelmed them with questions. Nearly all complained wearily of the unbearable financial burdens they had to bear; but, whenever they spoke of the Duke himself, they were high in their praises.

During his walk he encountered again and again the name he had noticed first in the palace; that of Giulio Romano. For Giulio Romano had not only painted pictures for the Gonzagas, but had done a great deal of architectural and engineering work. At the end of the city there was a delightful little palace called the Palazzo del Te which he had built and decorated with murals. He had designed churches, planned canals, erected memorials—the whole of Mantua seemed to recall his memory. When Pieter started back after his long walk, he felt that there was no one he wanted to resemble so much as that versatile man.

Catarina was missing from the supper table. The few people sitting round it explained to him that the actors who appeared in the evening seldom ate before a performance, as an empty stomach was necessary for good acting. This disappointed Pieter, who had dressed with special care for her sake; he wore his finest Flemish clothes. He asked how to get to the theater. After following endless corridors and climbing innumer-

able stairs, he joined an ever-increasing crowd which took him with it to the theater, without his having to ask his way. In spite of the fine weather, the performance did not take place in the open air. The orchestra was already playing when he entered, and it was only with difficulty that he found a place in the back row. The music was strangely different from any he had heard at home. He learned from his neighbors that tonight the wonderful spectacle of *The Labors of Heracles* was to be presented. The people next him were not courtiers but burghers, yet they talked with great familiarity of the affairs of the palace and the distinguished personages in the audience. The Duke's box was still empty. At last the curtain rose. Pieter was amazed at the brilliant spectacle spread before him. In the background Zeus was enthroned on clouds painted a brilliant white and pink; the bearded god wore a golden crown and in one hand clasped the lightning, cunningly fashioned out of gleaming metal. On the right the façade of a Greek palace could be seen, on the left a temple with pillars. The scene represented a forest; there were trees with gilded trunks; the bright-green foliage was diversified with garish flowers and fruit which had little resemblance to nature. The drama started at once: Zeus began to declaim among the clouds, and Pieter recognized at once the voice of the old actor who had sat at the head of the dinner table. It was difficult to understand the text, especially when new gods and goddesses kept appearing among the clouds with the help of some intricate stage machinery. Aphrodite had her say, then Hephaestus and Apollo. The argument ended with the appearance of Heracles, almost stark naked, with a lion skin thrown over his shoulder and a club in his hand. From the other side his wife, Deianira entered; she was played by Catarina. She was dressed very lightly; her strong thighs flashed at every movement of her white draperies; her breasts were clearly outlined through the thin fabric. Everyone in the auditorium arose. Pieter was surprised that an actress should receive such honor, but one of his neighbors nudged him, and he saw that the Duke was just taking his place in the box.

Then, after the players had paused to bow to the Duke, the play went on. Heracles and Deianira talked and sang for a while about love; Zeus interrupted them with a shout; Deianira ran from the stage, while on the other side the lion of Nemea appeared at the mouth of a cave. The lion was, of course, a man in a lion's skin, but he acted his part with great

skill. He and Heracles fought for a long time, until Heracles at last forced him into the cave and strangled him with his bare hands. Some children rushed on to the stage. They danced round the victor and disappeared. Deianira appeared again and embraced her husband. But she in turn had to vanish, for now the hydra of Lerna emerged from the trees. The dragon was presented by four men hidden in a gleaming coat of scaly green mail; one of them operated the formidable nine heads which shot out their tongues in a terrifying manner; bluish flames issued from their mouths. The monster tried to avoid Heracles, but the hero shot burning arrows into its body and hacked off its nine heads with his sword. Red blood flowed from the headless necks. The play went on, the boar of Erymanthus, the birds of Stymphalus, the stag with the golden antlers and bronze legs, the bull of Crete, the mares of Diomedes all appeared in turn. Then came the contest for the girdle of the Amazon Queen; Pieter's table companion, the elderly actress, appeared and wrestled with the hero until their bones seemed to crack. At last, in an opening in the sylvan scene, the entrance of Hades became visible; the screams of the damned rose from its flaming abysses, and Cerberus barked fiercely before the gate. When Cerberus had been vanquished, the trees slid back into position again, and at the same time a big rock appeared on which a vulture was feasting upon the liver of Prometheus. Heracles killed the vulture, whereupon the Hesperides danced in among the trees, one of them holding up the golden apple. Deianira appeared after each scene. The episode of the Augean stables was omitted, the producer probably being unable to solve the technical problems it presented. Instead the River God, Acheloüs, was introduced in the shape of the bull of mythology. Heracles broke off its golden horns, returned them again in answer to its laments, and received instead the cornucopia of Amalthea. The cornucopia was so huge that a man could have stood in it; it was borne on to the stage by nymphs. Heracles clapped his hands, whereupon the horn of plenty began to disgorge its treasures: an endless series of men and women appeared from it, dressed as gold, silver, diamonds, food, drink, fruit—they overflowed the whole stage. Each carried a shield held high over his head. Heracles and Deianira, walking on this floor of shields, bowed before the footlights, while the whole stage was flooded with purple light. Then the curtain fell.

Pieter was quite tired when he reached the corridor off which his room

lay. He had run across the old actor who had played Zeus. They greeted one another with great friendliness and paused to discuss the performance. Pieter was astonished that the Duke should support such a large company, but the actor explained that there were only ten of them, all told; the rest of the performers—well-nigh a hundred—were recruited from among the servants, the soldiers and the townspeople.

"Catarina hasn't come back yet?" the actor asked, nodding toward a door.

"I haven't seen her," Pieter replied, but he took a note of the door. He would have liked to continue the conversation—perhaps Catarina would arrive presently—but the old man was anxious to get to bed. Pieter went to his own room. Before he fell asleep, he thought over the experiences of the day, trying to decide which had left the strongest impression on him.

"Catarina," he said, but corrected himself the next moment: "No, no, Giulio Romano."

Next day he continued his study of the palace. At ten o'clock he hurried to Chieppio.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, when the secretary received him after half an hour's wait; "I've seen the collection of medals and coins. But it's almost impossible to appreciate it without expert assistance. Let me have someone who can explain it."

Chieppio smiled. He asked Pieter to wait for another half hour in his anteroom, while he settled urgent business, and then he would accompany him himself. The Duke's collection was one of the most valuable in Europe. Chieppio himself had given much time to numismatics, and the high standard of the collection was more to his credit than the Duke's.

"Let's begin with this Greek silver coin: it's called a tetradrachmon. This gold piece was issued in the days of Alexander the Great. . . ."

"Yes, I thought so. It's called a stater too."

Chieppio gave him a surprised glance. But he went on:

"A lovely piece and extremely rare. Feel how heavy it is. A gold piece of Eucratides, King of Batrira. Its value was twenty stater."

"So this is it. I must say, sir, I feel proud to be allowed to handle it. I have read that this is the largest extant ancient coin."

"Yes, you are right. But are you really interested in it?"

"Very much indeed. I have long wished to start a collection, but I've

always needed my money for something else. It doesn't matter, I'm still young. But I've begun to read about it and studied some collections at home. My teacher was a famous painter in Antwerp called Van Veen. He is a great admirer of the ancient world."

Chieppio put his hand on Pieter's shoulder.

"I shall continue your instruction. I tell you frankly I am very happy to do so. Let's look at the rest. This small coin is an obol from Agri-gentum; I found it myself in Girgenti. . . ."

The lecture went on, and Pieter was late for lunch. Catarina was just preparing to go when he arrived, but she stayed to keep him company. They continued the flirtatious game of the day before with great enjoyment. Long after the others had left they sat talking. Pieter closed his eyes and tried to recall the long, slim legs flashing through the Greek draperies. It excited him to undress the girl in his thoughts. He hardly listened to the stream of her talk. She told him the story of her life, which was not very interesting.

He still thought of her as he continued his studies during the afternoon. Work was difficult, and he gave it up soon to have a look at the zoo. For Duke Vincenzo had a fair-sized zoo. There were two lions, twenty huge elephants, four camels, a zebra, a boa constrictor, a leopard, a hyena, a crocodile, a hippopotamus, and many other animals. Pieter stayed till dusk before the cages, sketching the beasts in imagination.

There was no performance that evening. Catarina took her supper with the others. In exchange for her own life story she asked for Pieter's. Pieter started half-heartedly with his years in Cologne, but he soon warmed up to his subject and spoke at great length about Oudenaarde, about Verhaecht and the hiding he had given him, about his mother and everything and everybody. He was surprised when he saw that his story had created a closer bond between them. He thought of the actress now not only as desirable but as a good companion.

He progressed steadily in his knowledge of the palace and in his interest in Catarina. One day, they sat alone again a long time at the table. They were still alone when they started out for their rooms. The corridor was deserted. They stopping at Catarina's door.

"I'd like to see your room," Pieter said audaciously.

Catarina did not answer. She opened the door and entered. Pieter fol-

lowed her. Next moment they were locked together, searching for each other's lips.

"Listen, *flammingo*," Catarina said in a whisper, "tonight I won't be having supper with you—but come to my room tomorrow at eleven. I have a hundred questions to ask you."

"I shall be there," Pieter replied softly.

They kissed again. But they separated quickly, for the door had opened. The old actor entered. He stopped on seeing them, his face expressionless.

"It's time to discuss your new part," he said to Catarina.

"Please go ahead," Pieter said quickly. "I won't disturb you."

He hurried from the room. In the evening he appeared for supper at the usual time. The old actor drew him into a corner.

"I've been wondering for a long time whether I should speak to you. I've decided that I should, for I've grown very fond of you. I've noticed that Catarina is attracted to you. I'm not surprised, for you're a handsome fellow. But I must warn you that Catarina is the Duke's present mistress. Such affairs usually don't last long with the Duke—but he's certainly infatuated with her now. And he's terribly jealous. He'll hound you out if he discovers what's happening, but that's the least of it. He'll persecute you all your life, for his influence reaches everywhere. . . . And now you can do what you like."

"Thank you," said Pieter, pressing the old man's hand.

"You are welcome, *flammingo*. What are you laughing at?"

"At your calling that big pink water bird a flamingo. Why? There is nothing Flemish about it."

"I hope you won't mind if I explain. You dress in bright colors. A flamingo is a bright-plumaged bird. You aren't angry?"

"Not me. A flamingo is a very beautiful bird."

The Duke commanded Pietro Paolo Rubens, court painter, to an audience next morning at nine o'clock, and the audience lasted only a minute or so.

"Have you had a look over the palace?"

"I have, Your Highness."

"Do you remember the portrait of my ancestress, Isabella d'Este, painted by Titian?"

"Certainly, Your Highness. It hangs in the Golden Room. Red velvet

dress, three-quarters profile, a pearl necklace and golden belt. The background is a dark greenish gray."

"Right. Make a copy of that picture for me. I want to see how you succeed. Your other instructions can wait. Now you may go."

Pieter bowed silently.

"Oh," the Duke said, "I hear that you're an excellent horseman. Tomorrow we are going to hunt and you may come along. Now go."

Pieter closed the door. He was elated. He hurried to Chieppio, who was glad to hear his news.

Then he went to Catarina's room.

"I came to tell you, my dear, that I shall not come to you tonight."

She did not speak. But her amazed looks forced an explanation.

"Catarina, I owe the Duke complete loyalty. It would be dishonest of me to deceive him. It might also ruin my career."

Her eyes flashed.

"Am I not worth your career?"

"No, Catarina. There is no woman in the world worth that. But I want you to know that I have grown very fond of you and desire you terribly."

"And in spite of that—you won't come?"

"No, Catarina. God bless you."

He went back to the zoo and walked about until he found the pink water bird with the curved beak on the shore of the small lake. He stared at it for some time. At last he sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Flamingo," he said, "we are by ourselves here. Let us be wise."

VIII

The young court painter was a great success. His copy of Isabella d'Este's portrait was so perfect that only with difficulty could it be distinguished from the original. He turned out to be such a good horseman during the first hunt and—even more important—such a pleasant talker, that the Duke invited him to all his hunting expeditions. A fortnight after his arrival he had completely won the favor of the prince. Now, this imposed upon him another task: that of soothing the jealousy of the courtiers. Accordingly he was careful to praise and flatter them on every opportunity—and was friendly to them all. Yet he lived as if in a jungle, threatened on every side. He kept his eyes open and watched.

The Duke was to visit Florence soon to attend the wedding of his sister-in-law. It would be a great occasion, and the Duke was determined to surpass all the other guests in the brilliance of his retinue. He picked it from the most distinguished members of his Court, among them his court painter. He provided Pieter with a set of rich clothes. When, one morning in October, the ducal family set out, Pieter rode in the entourage; he wore a blue velvet jacket embroidered with gold.

The Duke's wife had a sister, Maria, who was ten years younger than she. Princess Maria Medici lived in Florence, at the court of her uncle. She had had many suitors, some of them belonging to royal dynasties. But she was a most fastidious young woman. Gradually she began to be a problem both in Florence and in Mantua, for she had now passed her twenty-seventh year and was almost regarded as an old maid. But in the end she triumphed. Henry IV, the King of France, who had lived in joyless wedlock with Marguerite de Valois, obtained an annulment of his marriage from the Holy See. He had promised to marry his mistress, Gabrielle d'Estrées—and he would have kept his promise if Gabrielle had not suddenly died. His councilors demanded unanimously that he should marry someone of royal blood. The King chose the Medici princess. Maria Medici was twenty-seven, Henry IV himself was in his forty-seventh year; and the Princess, one of the richest heiresses in Europe, would bring with

her a dowry of six hundred thousand gold pieces. A secret mission was sent to Florence with the King's offer, and at last Maria gave her consent. She had waited to become Queen of France.

All this was familiar history to the Mantuan court. Those who rode beside and behind the Duke along the highroad were particularly well informed. The various ambassadors and couriers brought gossip from every court to Mantua. Of Henry IV, for example, it was known that he perspired strongly and used perfume to conceal it, but in vain. Also, well known was the cynical quip which won him a throne: "Paris is well worth a Mass." For he was a Protestant turned Catholic. The courtiers trotting behind the Duke knew all sorts of tittle-tattle about the French king whose wedding they were on their way to attend. Of course they spoke in whispers; the Duke might have objected to any disrespectful jest at the expense of his future brother-in-law.

"Why are you so silent, *fiammingo*?" a captain of the mercenaries asked Pieter.

"I'd like to ask you a question, captain."

"Go ahead; ask it."

"What would have happened to France if Henry IV hadn't obtained the crown?"

"Why, she would have passed under the rule of Philip II, King of Spain."

"So Henry more or less preserved the freedom of his country?"

"That's the gist of it."

"Could a prince do anything greater if he loved his people and his country?"

The others were silent. Then the captain said:

"I understand. You are ruled by the Spaniards. I realize that you must feel out of sorts whenever you think of it. For you seem rather sad today, *fiammingo*."

"You'd better leave me alone, captain. I have a headache."

That was not true; he felt quite well. But, ever since he had come to Italy, he had been obsessed by thoughts which greatly disturbed him. Recently he had begun to doubt his own talent as a painter. The seed of that doubt had been sown by Breughel in Antwerp. Breughel had declared bluntly on his return from Italy that the painters of that country were better than the Flemish. The members of the Luke Guild praised and

feasted one another at their banquets and fell into the drunken delusion that the painters of Antwerp were the first in the world. And yet, there were better men even in Germany. . . .

Pieter had not been shocked by Breughel's grim words at the time, because he simply did not believe them. But here in Italy he could see for himself that Breughel might be right. Memling counted as a great master, certainly. But Italy possessed dozens of painters who were his equals. The realization filled Pieter, the artist, with enthusiasm, but saddened the Flemish patriot. Every young Flemish painter, he felt, had the high duty of raising the art of Antwerp above that of all other cities. But did the younger generation possess the ability to do so? He began a searching analysis of his own gifts. He had every reason to believe that he would soon become a complete master of his profession. He was aware that few artists possessed such dexterity on the purely technical side. He could imitate the style of other painters with unsurpassed skill; by examining the paintings of the great masters he could tell how they held the brush and how their hands moved, and provide convincing proof. He examined his sense of color. He received intense pleasure from the great masterpieces. He could apprehend at a glance the reasons for any scheme of color distribution, and understood at once the complicated emotions which the artist was expressing by means of it. He could weigh the value of every shadow; he had discovered long ago that the ban on certain arrangements of colors was pure superstition—for instance yellow, violet, and pink really could be combined to obtain a pleasant effect. He had no doubts of his ability to handle color. He next considered his sense of perspective, but decided that his knowledge of it was faultless. The hardest problems of perspective did not cause him difficulty, either, when they were purely geometrical—or when he had no alternative but to cheat all the rules of geometry. Next he analyzed his gift for composition. He could find no fault with it. He could perceive at once the basic scheme of a picture and explain the reason for the minutest detail; and in his opinion a man who understood art was on the same level as an artist. His general education could not be criticized; he knew history, the classics, and the Bible with an intimacy which few could rival. On the basis of all this, he could prophesy for himself a brilliant career. And yet . . . there remained an inexplicable doubt, a doubt which filled him with painful anxiety, just because it was inexplicable. In every great work of art he felt the presence

of something which he could not define. He called it "Attic salt," in accordance with his classical education—but these were merely words and meant little. What was the essence of art? This "Attic salt"? Could he reproduce it in his own work? He could not answer the question. And now, while the others talked and joked, he sat listlessly in his saddle, grimly staring ahead.

Their entry into Florence was impressive. The brilliant early October sunshine lay over the city. Outside the gates the Duke Ferdinando received the brilliant cavalcade at the head of an impressive retinue. Vincenzo presented some of the members of his party to his uncle-in-law, Ferdinando Medici. Pieter was among those so honored. He bowed low to the aging Ferdinando and his insignificant wife, Christina of Lorraine. As was his custom, he observed their features closely. The woman's face failed to interest him, but in Ferdinando he detected something Spanish. No wonder; the mother of the ruler of Florence had been Eleonora of Toledo.

After the ceremonial reception they entered the city. Pieter gazed eagerly at Florence, at the alternate pattern of white and black stones, the Cathedral, the Baptisterio, the great square, the Palazzo Vecchio, the statues, the streets still carrying echoes of Dante's gigantic world, the bridge over the river, the houses jutting above the water on the far bank, the imposing Pitti Palace.

The ducal palace failed to accommodate the innumerable guests. A clerk received them in a ground-floor room, with a list of names and lodgings on the desk before him. The courtiers were given their cards and remounted their horses with a servant to guide them. Pieter was given a room in a small inn near by, which he considered preferable to being quartered in a private house; for he was thus his own master and would not be obliged to play the part of a guest. He set down his luggage and at once hurried out again. He was by temperament unexcitable, but now he could not hide his excitement. He had questioned many people in Mantua and studied a number of descriptions of Florence in the library there, and now he knew exactly where to find the things he wished to see. The campanile of Giotto, the bronzes of Ghiberti, the cathedral of Brunelleschi, the palaces of the Strozzi and other distinguished families, the famous statues and paintings. He felt again, as on his arrival in

Mantua, that he was entering a new school. But there he had only had to study a palace—here, a whole city. He started at once.

That evening, while dining at the inn, he noticed a young man at a neighboring table. He was a short, sturdy, ugly fellow with a very big mouth, his face rather froglike and forbidding, but there was so much kindness and intelligence in his eyes that one forgot his appearance. They started to talk, and it turned out that the ugly young man had also been invited to the wedding.

"I had no need to travel to Florence," he said, "I stay here. I am studying in Italy. After some difficulty the State Council of Provence entrusted me with the task of delivering its marriage congratulations. I am a Provençal. My name is Peiresc."

Pieter introduced himself and began to speak in French, but the young man smiled and stuck to Italian.

"Don't bother, Messer Rubens. My mother tongue is just as different from French as from your language. You're a painter, so I take it you're an Italian."

"No, I am Flemish. They call me '*il flammingo*' here. I am the court painter to the Duke of Mantua, and I came here in his retinue. What were the difficulties about your appointment?"

Peiresc smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"If you are court painter to Duke Vincenzo, you must have heard the story that's been flying about here in Florence."

"No," Pieter shook his head. "I haven't heard it."

"No? Mantua must be a queer place if that story hasn't reached it. Of course I don't believe the ridiculous story, but I can at least tell you about the incredible fairy tales that the students of Padua are spinning just now. Among the professors of the Bo there's a young scientist called Galileo who teaches amazing things, mostly in flat contradiction to the principles of Aristotle. . . . May I offer you some of this Chianti?"

"Thank you, I never drink wine. But the things you say are exciting enough without that. How is it possible for anyone in a world-famous university to contradict the great Aristotle?"

The young Provençal hesitated, gave Pieter a suspicious glance, and then said:

"We live in a very strange world, Messer. Have you ever studied such subjects as physics?"

"Yes. But they didn't interest me much. I gave my time to modern languages and the classics. And, of course, art. But you spoke of some story running about Florence, and still unknown in Mantua. And that there had been some difficulties about your appointment."

"That is so. All Europe is filled with rumors that Duke Ferdinando, the present ruler, attained the throne by murder. Not ordinary murder, either, but fratricide. Have you ever heard of Bianca Capello?"

Pieter shook his head.

"I may have heard of her, but I don't remember. I'd be very glad to hear the full story."

"Bianca Capello was the daughter of a Venetian patrician, and she eloped with a handsome young man, a poor bank clerk. They came to Florence. Here the ruler, Duke Francesco, saw her one day, and fell in love with her. For many years she was his mistress, and after the death of his wife he married her. Bianca was very unpopular in Florence, for she had a worthless brother who acquired far too much influence in state matters and abused it unscrupulously. Duke Francesco, too, had a brother, who had entered the Church and lived as a Cardinal in Rome. One summer, exactly thirteen years ago, the Cardinal came to Florence for a visit. And soon afterward Francesco and Bianca died of a mysterious illness—both within a day or two. The Cardinal left the Church at once and took possession of his brother's throne. He looked round him for a bride, but no European house was willing to accept him—he was considered to be his brother's murderer. At last, with much difficulty, he was accepted by this Lorraine princess, but his suit lasted for years."

"I think I have heard something about this," Pieter said. "But you seem to have it at your finger ends. Are you interested in politics?"

"Frankly, yes. The classics fascinate me and so does archaeology, but my real passion is for politics."

Pieter's face lighted up.

"I share your interest. I see you know all about things here. What is the present policy of the Duke of Florence? Can you tell me something about it? The Duke's mother was Spanish; I suppose that influences his policy."

"Amazing, how little you know in Mantua. The Duke broke long ago with the policy of the House of Medici and turned against the Spanish. We live in dangerous times—a declaration of war by the Pope may be

expected at any moment. The Pope is in with Fuentes, the Spanish governor of Naples, and Olivarez, the Spanish Ambassador in Rome. But Ferdinando is sticking to his guns."

"So he is anti-Spanish. That is surprising."

"You are trying to hide your feelings, sir, your feelings against the Spaniards. . . ."

"Excuse me," Pieter said quickly, "I said nothing against the Spaniards."

"True, but I know all the same. You are Flemish—and that tells me everything. But your feelings aren't my business. I only wanted to say that this Duke Ferdinando deserves every sympathy. Even if he did kill his brother, who was a bad ruler, I don't mind much. I only see the soul of the artist in him. While he was a Cardinal in Rome, the Vatican showed not the slightest interest in art. He was the only great collector close to the Pope.

"We owe him the recovery of some wonderful works of art. And I don't believe he killed his brother. Francesco was probably killed without Ferdinando's knowledge by people who thought they would win his favor in that way. Ferdinando is a gentle, kindly, honorable man, prepared to do anything for art and science; his policy is sober and courageous. He deserves our respect and gratitude. And I am very proud to greet him in the name of Provence."

Pieter was fascinated by his new acquaintance. Peiresc was obviously a cultivated man whose intellectual leanings were almost the same as his own. He knew classical literature at least as well as Pieter did. They returned to politics. Peiresc knew little about the Spaniards and Pieter a great deal; in Antwerp, which was regarded as conquered Spanish territory, he had heard a great deal of gossip about the Spanish royal house, much as a native of distant Iberia might have heard about the court of the Roman Caesars. He was glad to satisfy Peiresc's curiosity. He told him about Philip II, who had died two years before, after familiarizing himself with death by being surrounded by coffins, incense, and funeral prayers recited in crypts, the only setting in which he had felt at ease. Of his son, Don Carlos, gossip said that he was either a madman or far too clever, and that his father, in consequence, had been forced to have him murdered, as otherwise he would not feel secure on his throne. The present king, Philip III, had turned resolutely from death. He alternately arranged huge court festivals at immense cost and

spent his hours in confession. He made no effort to rule, but left all affairs of state to the Duke of Lerma, his favorite. The fate of Flanders was now a little more bearable. The Governor, the Austrian Archduke Albrecht, had been given more or less a free hand. He was a kindly man and had no wish to oppress the people, his main care being to strengthen the clergy; and he had founded one monastery after another.

They talked for a long time at the grimy table of the little inn. They parted as friends. After this they tried to spend as much time together as possible, but Pieter was kept very busy. He had to attend the festivals, parades, stage performances, hunts, and excursions, without which no day passed; Duke Vincenzo always insisted on having his retinue around him in strength and undiminished splendor. The many buildings in the town, the innumerable pictures in the churches, the paintings in private houses also took up much of Pieter's time.

Among the large crowd of wedding guests he one day came upon Pourbus, the painter. Pourbus was, strictly speaking, court painter at Mantua, for the Duke had employed him in Antwerp. But he had never taken up his position. Pieter was afraid lest Pourbus had stayed away from Mantua because he was aggrieved by Pieter's employment. But his anxiety turned out to be groundless. Pourbus greeted him with marked friendliness; and, when they met alone for the first time, he explained that he had not the slightest intention of going to Mantua; he had serious hopes of becoming court painter to Henry IV.

Both of them were present at the wedding ceremony. The majority of the guests could not find a place in the church, which was uncomfortably crowded—but the painters were given the very best positions, so that they might see everything and later paint the scene. Henry IV was unable to be present; he had to be with his troops, and he was represented by his Master of Horse, Bellegarde.

The bride's dress created a sensation even in that rich and jeweled concourse. She lived up to her reputation; it was said no princess in the world spent more on finery. She had three dresses which were as famous as great masterpieces: one of dove-gray embroidered with pure gold, one of blue embroidered with golden lilies, and another entirely of spun gold and silver thread. This last was the one she wore now; the crown on her head was studded with amethysts and pearls. After the wedding the new queen set out at once for France.

But the wedding celebrations did not end with her departure. The guests were entertained for weeks with banquets, games, and all sorts of displays. Duke Vincenzo notified the members of his entourage to prepare for a stay of at least six weeks. The order pleased Pieter: he was enjoying the company of Peiresc and the hours spent studying the city's art treasures. The works of Andrea del Sarto, the Lippis, and others enriched his experience; but, as he admired these masters, the old doubt raised its head again: who was he and how far would his talent take him? If he compared himself with others, he could feel confident, and yet there remained a formless, vague doubt which disturbed him. He felt an emptiness, a strange, indefinable vacuum within him. . . .

One day Peiresc urged him to go to the San Domenico Monastery to look at Fra Angelico's pictures. He had often heard the name of the monkish painter, but had never seen any of his work. Nor did he attach any special importance to the name. He classified Fra Angelico with the "great second-raters." But, being a conscientious man, he did not feel at liberty to neglect even one whom he considered a minor painter.

A Dominican friar acted as his guide at the monastery. He did not find anything interesting on the ground floor, and listened somewhat absent-mindedly to the friar. Then they went upstairs to view the monks' quarters. Here Fra Angelico had lived: he had covered the walls of their cells with his work. Pieter stared at the murals and felt an extraordinary excitement which he could hardly control.

"What sort of a man was he?" he asked the monk. "Tell me all you know about him."

The Dominican replied with pleasure. He enjoyed talking of the pride of the monastery.

"Our brother was born in Vicchio, Messer. His name was Fra Giovanni Angelico da Fiesole, but the name Giovanni he assumed in our order; he was originally christened Guido. He was under twenty years when he entered this monastery. It is said that he had painted before that, and that Lorenzo Monaco had taught him in the School of Siena, but nobody knows whether this was really so. He spent his novitiate at Certosa, where he filled the Dominican monastery with his pictures; I would advise you strongly to visit the place, Messer. Later he lived for a while in Fiesole, and he must have been fifty when he returned to us. He then spent eight years in this house. During that time he painted these murals. First he

made an altarpiece. The abbot liked it, and he was allowed to go on. According to the testimony of his contemporaries, he was a most gentle man; no one ever saw him angry. Before he took up the brush, he always prayed; and, when he painted the wounds of Christ, he wept bitterly. The Pope heard of him and commanded him to go to Rome. He wished to make him Bishop of Florence, but Fra Angelico implored his superiors to intercede with the Holy See; he thought he was unworthy of such a high office. Finally he was listened to, and did not become a bishop. But he had to go to Rome, and there he died, a little before his seventieth birthday. You are a painter, sir. Don't you consider **him** a wonderful artist?"

"Oh yes, yes," Pieter replied politely.

He left a considerable donation with the monk, spent several minutes in front of the Annunciation, frowned, shrugged his shoulders, and left. He hurried to the inn where he was to lunch with Peiresc.

"Well, what's your opinion about the painter, Pietro? Isn't he enchanting?"

"Oh yes, very good. One rarely comes across such fine work."

"Is that all?" Peiresc glanced at him.

"What else can I say? Isn't it enough?"

They talked of other things. Fra Angelico's name was not mentioned again. And yet Pieter could not get him out of his mind. After dinner he stretched himself on his bed and began to think about Fra Angelico and himself.

He began with his criticisms of the painter. Fra Angelico's perspective was not faultless. His composition might be better planned, more concentrated. His style of painting was certainly quite good, but in superior assurance of brushwork he himself was incomparably finer. Having decided this, the young man pursued his thoughts still further.

Whatever point I choose for comparison, I am the superior. Why is my mind not at ease, then? Why can't I call myself the better artist? It's the same problem that I meet over and over again and that I can't formulate even in my thoughts. This monk wept while he painted. Would I ever do that? Never. I am cool and clever and never yield to passing moods. Yes, there is one word I loathe. They call it inspiration. A priggish swindle, colored dust thrown into the eyes of ignorant buyers, invented to make people believe that there is a magical state of mind in which the

artist paints without knowing what he is doing—and yet it results in a masterpiece. The buyers may believe it, but I know there is no such thing. A man who paints in a state like that cannot get his perspective right. Whatever he does can't be good if there isn't a cool hand behind it. Fra Angelico cried; instead of getting his perspective right, he drowned himself in religious grief. He failed to achieve perfection. No, I'll have none of your inspiration. This divine madness is nothing more than a business trick. An artist must be in full command of his intellectual powers. He shouldn't spend the night in drinking, because if he does next day he'll have a headache and be unable to paint well. Let him have sufficient sleep and work with a fresh mind, and an undimmed spirit—then his work is bound to be the better for it. Nobody abuses sobriety, knowledge, and diligence except those who lack them. I have examined myself and I maintain that I shall mean at least as much to posterity as this Fra Angelico. And I mustn't allow modesty to affect my thoughts. . . . I shall mean more.

He tried to feel happy and triumphant. And that was not difficult. But, when he turned on his side for his afternoon nap, something still disturbed him, something, he did not know what.

IX

The wedding festivities gave Duke Vincenzo an opportunity to acquire a great many works of art; for Florence was a splendid market. He displayed his new treasures with elation. But his most exciting acquisition he did not display—Giulietta, the fair-haired actress whom he had engaged as a member of his company. It was December when they returned to Mantua. And it was easy to notice the alteration in the Duke's favors: Catarina received no part in the first stage performance. She became ill with chagrin; for two days she did not appear in the dining room. But on the evening of the third day she again sat down at the table, where she still retained her old place. The whole company waited eagerly for the combat between the rivals; but nothing happened. The meal finished in peace. Pieter went to his room to put on warmer clothes—he intended to go for a walk in town. As he was dressing, the door of his room opened, and Catarina slipped in. She went up to him, looked at him for a while in silence, and then asked:

"Are you afraid of me, now?"

"No, not now," Pieter replied with a smile.

The next moment they were in each other's arms.

Catarina became Pieter's mistress. Next day the whole Court knew about it. In three days the Duke himself was informed. Early in the new year he and his retinue went hunting. During the chase, when Pieter's horse was close to his, Vincenzo gave him a mocking yet benevolent smile:

"I hear you are occupying yourself with astronomy and have got yourself a star from the sky."

Pieter modestly pretended not to understand. The Duke went on:

"All right, all right. I know everything. Be kind to her; she's a very decent girl and deserves to be treated well."

Then he turned away and addressed someone else. Pieter called that afternoon on Chieppio and asked whether he had any objection to his using Catarina as a model. Chieppio shook his head and smiled.

"Go ahead. I have no objection, nor has anyone else."

Pieter found his room the most suitable studio. His task was to copy; the Duke perpetually demanded new copies of the palace paintings, which he then gave away. To give was a passion with him, and it was a wonder that the treasures of the palace should go on increasing in spite of the multitude of gifts he scattered all over Europe. These copies occupied most of Pieter's time. Sometimes he could steal a little time for himself; he copied for his own satisfaction a male nude by Correggio and some detail from Mantegna. He could use the brush and chalk with amazing speed. All who saw him at work marveled at his dexterity. But he had not yet used a living model in Mantua. Several faces had caught his attention, and he had sketched them from memory, but he had never painted a portrait. He knew that if he painted anyone, his model would beg to have the picture, and such a gift would bring demands for a hundred others. *He* wanted to earn money with his gifts. He had decided on his goal: he would make a fortune. The Duke paid him badly, but he saved the money and had already made some art purchases out of it. He himself wanted to possess a fine collection. So, from purely business considerations, he painted no portraits, but waited for the great command to come. Now he had a living model. But he encountered opposition where he least expected it; Catarina flatly refused.

"I don't understand you, Catarina. Thousands of women make no objection to it. Why won't you?"

"Because I am ashamed."

"But you aren't ashamed when we're together in bed?"

"That's different. I love you. *You* can see me—that's different."

"Well, that's just it. I shall see you and paint you."

"No, no. I shall be there in the picture. Everybody will see me."

"And what about your acting? You were almost naked when you played the nymph. Didn't everybody see you then?"

"The stage is different. I can't explain, but it's different."

He argued for days, but in vain. They made love frankly; but, as soon as he suggested he should paint her, she stubbornly refused.

"Look, Catarina, you would be doing a great service to my art. A painter needs a model as much as he needs food."

"A fig for your art. I'm not in love with your art. I love you because you're charming and wickedly handsome with your little fair beard."

"All right. If you don't want to, don't. You don't love me. I'll find someone else."

Catarina was alarmed.

"What? You mean to say that a woman will come here and undress before you?"

"Of course. I must paint."

"No, no, my friend, you won't! I'll strangle her with my own hands."

"I'll see that you don't. Come, don't let us argue. If you're here at seven tomorrow morning as my model, well and good. If not, I'll look round for another model tomorrow."

Next morning Catarina turned up at seven. She argued for a long time with her lover, telling him that he ought to be content with partial nudity, but he was inexorable. She undressed at last; Peter seated her in an armchair over which he had flung his bedspread.

"Now you are Dido on her throne."

He had to push the armchair about a long time before he found the right light. Catarina blushed deeply, and Pieter noted for the first time that blushes are not confined to the face. Though Catarina covered her face and her breasts, the rest of her body blushed. But that no longer interested the young man, only the painter. Catarina stared at him in amazement.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" Pieter asked.

"I can't understand you. Usually when you look at my naked shoulder your face changes, your eyes become different. But now you're so serious. You stare at me as if I were a soulless block."

"That's practically true, my angel. At present you're just a subject."

He worked. Catarina was silent. Half an hour passed, then she spoke:

"My neck's aching horribly. Couldn't we take a rest?"

"Oh, yes. I'd like to myself."

Catarina got up, and wrapped the bedspread around herself—her naked knee flashed from it as she walked about. She went over to the easel. Pieter was just beginning to sketch her breasts.

"It's an outrage," she cried.

"What's an outrage?"

"You're painting my breasts, and your hand isn't even trembling. Is that all your love amounts to?"

"You see, Catarina, how silly you were to be so shy. I can paint your

breast as calmly as if I were painting a still life, noting the shape and color of an apple, for instance. Why should an apple be ashamed?"

Catarina tried to find an answer but could not. She shrugged her shoulders and gave up the fight.

"I can't argue with you. I only know one thing; I love you more than you love me."

"How do you know that? How can you be so certain?"

"Because you have never lost your wits over me. When you should have been out of your mind with happiness, you remained sober and thoughtful. I've watched you—you never close your eyes when you kiss me."

"Really? I never thought of it. Strange."

"Yes, it's strange. I hate you. I love you, but I hate you, too."

Pieter smiled.

Catarina began to be really angry.

"You're terrible. I can't argue with you. I loathe you for your brains. God punished me when I fell in love with you."

Pieter merely laughed. He took her into his arms and kissed her. She nestled close to him with a happy sigh and kissed him wildly, but Pieter carried her gently to the armchair.

"We have rested enough. Let's go on."

Catarina swallowed her disappointment. Resigning herself to her fate, she patiently took up her former pose. Pieter began to paint again and started to analyze his feelings. He had accustomed himself long since to give up part of his mind to a totally different chain of thought as he worked. Now he was working again with concentration, but at the same time he reflected how right Catarina was: he did not love her. He acknowledged this with a certain satisfaction and recalled the court gossip that, in his jealousy, the Duke had once hidden in the actors' corridor, not caring if the palace guards saw him. No, he was not in love with her. He knew already the part women would play in his life: for the time being he would content himself with harmless trifling, always easy for a handsome young man—then, at home in Antwerp, he would choose a suitable girl, pretty, of good family, and a devout servant of her husband's art.

Philips wrote to him occasionally: his letters were rare but always interesting. He wrote, in a somewhat pretentious Latin epistolatory style,

that he would not be long in Louvain with Richardot. The older Richardot boy was a grown-up youth and was continuing his studies in Rome, where he held a distinguished position: he was the Roman representative of Archduke Albrecht, the Governor of Flanders. The younger Richardot boy was also growing up; his father intended to send him soon to Rome—and not alone, but with Philips Rubens as his tutor.

The desire to visit Rome had become very strong in Pieter. He knew Mantua well; the town had no longer any new impression to give him. He had explored Florence. Milan interested him little. But the Eternal City excited his imagination. He was daring enough to hint his desire to Chieppio. When he mentioned it the third time, the secretary nodded.

"All right, I take due notice of the fact that you want to go to Rome. I cannot promise you anything, but I'll speak to His Highness."

To obtain the Duke's consent was not a hopeless matter. He had always had a favorite courtier for whom he sent every day, and whom he delighted to favor—and this favorite was now Pieter. He saw the Duke once, sometimes twice, every day. They talked a great deal together, but not about pictures. Vincenzo would speak a few polite words about the work of his court painter and then turn to some other subject. He liked to discuss the classics, which he knew remarkably well. He loved to tell at great length of his journeys to distant countries. And he would deliver long monologues on women and love.

One spring day they were riding out together when the Duke said after a short pause:

"I am going to the wars, Pietro."

"Against whom, Your Highness? I am astonished at the news."

"I shall go to Hungary, of course. It is the duty of every Christian ruler to fight there against the Turk. My dear friend, the Emperor Rudolf, isn't the man for such tasks. He lives in Prague and spends all his time in the study of the natural sciences. I like travel—and besides I get absolution for my many sins by fighting against the Turkish infidel, and I also enjoy a little campaign now and then. I have a Hapsburg friend called George Basta, a general, who always gives me something suitable and interesting to do. I'm going to Hungary again this summer."

Pieter looked at him. Then he said:

"Have you ever killed a man, Your Highness?"

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking about war itself, Your Highness. I hate war. I hate violence, pain, and death. Don't you, Your Highness?"

Duke Vincenzo laughed.

"No, Pietro, I don't. The Turk has attacked Christendom; therefore Christendom must be defended. Must we allow the whole of Europe to be subjected to pagan tyranny? Don't you see that this war is necessary and just? There will be wars as long as there are men—for man is a fighting, quarrelsome animal. *Homo homini lupus*. Even in private life, you must be armed and on the alert day and night against your enemies—and everybody has enemies. We live in a jungle. But that isn't the point. War makes you skillful, strong, and disciplined, gives you presence of mind and courage, develops your spirit and your muscles. War is right. It's healthy, like blood-letting."

"It grieves me to contradict such a great ruler. But I maintain that you can steel your body and mind without war. Fencing, physical exercise, hunting serves the purpose equally well. You see, Your Highness, if two guards come to blows in a corridor of your palace, you call it lack of discipline and punish both of them severely, however courageously and expertly they tan each other's hides. Why is the same thing which you punish in two men justified in two armies?"

"You are unreasonable, Pietro. Of two opposing armies one is always the attacker, the other the defender. What is to happen if the attacker won't listen to your humane and reasonable arguments? Should the other yield and become his slave? But, I repeat, there will always be an attacker as long as men inhabit the earth. Old women and pious priests say that God sends us war as a punishment for our sins. What is the truth, if you examine it closely? Hungary, for instance, is a Protestant country. There are hardly any Catholics there. According to the old women there, the war is due to the sins of the Catholics. But, if you listen to the old women here in Mantua, the war is due to the heresies of Protestants. Both of them talk nonsense. There is war because the Turk wants to extend his power at other people's expense. Therefore the guns had to speak. Nothing is more natural."

"Yes, Your Highness, it is natural for anyone to defend his own. But do the two parties always try to find a peaceful solution first? The rashness of the rulers is chiefly to blame, and the diplomats may not be wise

and conscientious enough—they may not abhor war sufficiently. The death of other people may be a matter of indifference to them.”

“I tell you, you’re unreasonable, Pietro. What should a country do when it is surrounded and attacked by enemies?”

“Let it try first to negotiate with the attackers.”

“But if it has tried and failed?”

“In that case, it is entitled to defend itself.”

“I should think so! I’m glad I have convinced you! But why are you looking so thoughtful now? What else is bothering you?”

“I was thinking what a fine profession diplomacy is. If a diplomat really loves life and values the lives of others as much as his own, what a wonderful role he has when war threatens: to bargain, to pacify, to negotiate, to persuade, to find paths by which the danger may be averted—and at last to save the peace.”

“You’re a dreamer, Pietro. The natural state of mankind is war. Peace is accidental in the scheme of things.”

“That may be true. But we must strive to make peace the natural state and war the exception.”

“Oh, you child, you impractical boy! To achieve that you would have to change human nature. And that is impossible.”

“Perhaps. But may I ask you a question, Your Highness?”

“Certainly.”

“Can man achieve the perfection of God?”

“Certainly not.”

“And yet Jesus Christ commanded us to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. Yet Christ does not expect the impossible of us. He only expects us to strive with all our might for the unattainable. Certainly we cannot change human nature. But we must strive to change it.”

“And how do you propose to achieve that?”

“By love, sir. We must love all men. Repay evil with good. Calm the wrathful. Pacify the violent. The Scripture commands us to do so. Your Highness, Christ did not love war.”

Duke Vincenzo glanced at his court painter and began to laugh.

“A fine state the country would be in if you were its ruler, Pietro. You’re a strange fellow. At first sight you’re a sensible and practical man; you know very well how to strike a bargain, you’re thrifty, and, if anyone wants to do business with you, he has to keep his eyes open. And now,

of a sudden, I find you're a religious dreamer. Come to your senses, my boy. Religion is a different matter from practical life. Christ didn't love the rich, did he? And he loved the poor. Then why are you saving money? Why are you trying to amass wealth? Tell me—if you can find an answer."

"I can, easily, Your Highness. I don't want to be rich—only free of care, so that I shall be able to paint as I like. And I want to marry some time. I shall beget children. I am thinking of them. I wouldn't like to bequeath them poverty. Besides I don't like destitution myself. I can stand poverty; the greater part of my childhood was spent in it. But destitution is different. There is a minimum that every living man and woman is entitled to expect. And everybody is entitled to use his talents to satisfy his own just needs. . . ."

"Don't get so excited! Hold your horses. I've noticed that whenever anyone mentions your talent for business you feel insulted straight away. Explain it to me."

"I can explain it, Your Highness. Superficial people usually associate art with disorderliness, negligence, untrustworthiness. Consequently when anyone brings up my common sense and diligence, I suspect that he doesn't consider me an artist."

"But you consider yourself an artist?"

Pieter did not reply at once. He stared at his pommel. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Your Highness, I can handle the brush as a champion fencer wields the rapier. But I don't know what an artist is. I am still trying to find out. Perhaps I shall, one day. What do you think of me, sir?"

"That you are an excellent artist. And I don't like you to doubt yourself. Do you know Monteverdi, the viola player in my orchestra?"

"Very well indeed."

"You see, he believes in himself fanatically. Ingegneri, the conductor, thinks he's a madman. He may be mad, but he must have great talent if he believes in it so strongly. He often says, with that gentle smile of his, that no real music has yet been written. He is going to show the world what music is. I am willing to believe him; and, if he really does invent a new kind of music, I won't be surprised. I think that modesty is a bad thing in an artist. An artist should be convinced that his equal does not exist."

"Your Highness, no one knows the technique of painting better than I do. I have no doubt of that. But what I am trying to discover is the essence of art. There is some mysterious quality in true art that I'm unable to find a name for. And I can't tell yet whether I possess that nameless quality. But don't think, sir, that my uncertainty means that I live in spiritual torment. I want to know because I am curious, not because I doubt my own talent. I am content to be as God made me. If He made me greater than other men, it is not my merit; if less, then I am not responsible. I try to enjoy life wisely and to give others as much pleasure as I can."

The Duke stopped his horse; they had reached the palace gate. Pieter reined in, too. The guards saluted, the gate began to open.

"You are a strange man, Pietro," the Duke said. "You have a great talent for happiness."

"Yes, Your Highness. The other name of happiness is contentment. And I am contented with everything. Even my wishes."

"You're a wise fellow. And what is your greatest wish, apart from reforming mankind and abolishing war?"

"I should like to visit Rome, Your Highness."

"Oh yes, Chieppio has mentioned it to me. We shall see what we can do about it. Good-by now."

The two horsemen separated. Pieter rode toward another courtyard of the palace. He unsaddled his horse and then set out for his room, lost in thought. He had grown very fond of the Duke; he was anxious to make the best possible impression on him. And he began to coin witty phrases to weave into their next conversation.

But next day the Duke did not send for him. Nor the day after. He was spending all his time with the captain of his mercenaries. The same sudden whim which had made him select Pieter as his temporary favorite, now made him drop him just as suddenly. Pieter accepted this philosophically—he knew his master.

One day he found a stranger in Chieppio's room. His name was Galileo Galilei; he was a young university professor from Padua. He had come to Mantua because the Duke had heard of his mathematical and engineering skill, and wanted to employ him in his theater.

"I have heard your name, messer," Pieter said.

"Where?" the tall young bearded scientist asked with apparent pleasure.

"I met a pupil of yours in Florence. His name was Peiresc. He spoke of you with great warmth."

"Oh, yes, Peiresc, the Provençal. A very pleasant and clever young man."

"He greatly praised your manner of lecturing and spoke of your scientific theories—but I am ashamed to confess that I have forgotten what he said about them."

Galileo laughed. They continued their talk with Chieppio and soon became great friends. The professor had a mind as sharp as a Toledo blade; a bewildering flood of Italian poured from his lips. His logic was sharp, his manner humorous and skeptical. Pieter discovered that as the Duke could not see him till the next day he had nothing at present to do. He invited him to go for a walk. They spoke chiefly of Rome—or rather Galilei talked vividly and amusingly of the time which he had spent as a youth in that city and the mathematical studies he had followed there under a German Jesuit priest. When they had exhausted the subject of Rome, they discussed Galilei's work. The professor related how his fellow students and professors alike had laughed at his revolutionary ideas; but now he had reached a safe haven, and proclaimed his theories from the professorial chair of the Paduan Bo itself.

"Why do you call your ideas *new*, messer? Science is eternal and therefore ancient."

Galilei laughed bitterly.

"Ancient science is not eternal, for it is full of mistakes. Aristotle taught a great deal of nonsense. The world must be shown that the science of Aristotle was primitive and erroneous."

"Well, well . . . won't that be rather a big task?"

"No. Aristotle must be dethroned."

"Perhaps you are right." Pieter said with an indulgent smile. "But who is going to dethrone him?"

"I am."

Pieter was startled. He remembered the Duke's words about Monteverdi. Here again was a man who believed in himself.

"God grant you success in your undertaking," he said politely.

"I am sure I shall succeed. But do you know what I'd like to do now? This walking has given me a thirst. Is there an inn hereabouts? You are familiar with the town."

"I am, but I don't know the inns. I don't like wine or spirits and never drink them."

The scientist stared at him in some astonishment.

"What a strange man you are. I don't despise wine. I thought we might have a talk over a bottle."

But Pieter remained immovable. They soon came to an inn, and Galilei said good-by. Next day the palace gossips were whispering that the Paduan professor had drunk till dawn. But he was up in time to pay his respects to the Duke. Their discussions were fruitless. Galilei asked too much, and the Duke was unable to squeeze the necessary money out of Chieppio. The scientist left, and Pieter did not see him again. Court life went on quietly, evenly. The Duke seemed more distant in manner to his court painter; he saw him only when they were out hunting.

But then he sent for him. Pieter went straight to Chieppio.

"I feel sure you know what the Duke wants with me."

"I know. A great desire of yours is to be granted. You are going to Rome."

"Really!" cried Pieter in delight.

"Yes. You will be provided with traveling expenses, letters of introduction, everything. The representative of His Highness at Rome is Lelis Arrigoni; he will be delighted to help you. His Highness did not stipulate how long you might stay—but it will be at least for some months. Your task will be to copy some pictures for the palace—a list is being prepared."

"Thank you, sir. When will His Highness receive me?"

"I really cannot say. It should have been this morning, but he has suddenly postponed all audiences indefinitely, you know. But now you must pardon me; I am very busy."

Pieter never had his audience. The Duke left the whole matter to Chieppio, and merely drew up the list of pictures to be copied.

The secretary fixed the eighth of July as the day of departure. Pieter spent the last afternoon with Catarina. She cried most of the time. Pieter consoled her gently, and promised that he would write often—but he went on packing with great perseverance. Suddenly he cried out:

"Stay as you are now!"

Catarina was nestling into the corner of the sofa with one arm hanging

over the back. Pieter seized his sketchbook and began to draw. She did not move, but she protested indignantly:

"It's too much . . . our very last day together . . . and you think only of your work. Don't you love me at all?"

Pieter was working hard and did not answer.

"Why don't you answer? I asked you a question."

When he glanced up, she saw that he had not heard.

"Forgive me, I wasn't listening. Don't move, please."

And he was lost once more in his work. Catarina began to cry, but resignedly. She remained motionless, but her face wore an expression of suffering.

X

Pieter spent almost ten months in Rome. When he returned to Mantua, Catarina was no longer at the Court. The old actor told him:

"She went away because she was mad with jealousy. Nobody knows where she's gone."

"I don't understand. You said—she left because she was jealous?"

"Yes. She was afraid you would find a new sweetheart in Rome."

"But how could it help her to leave Mantua?"

The old actor shrugged his shoulders.

"Messer Rubens, I can only tell you what I know. Don't try to find logic in women."

Pieter nodded and accepted the fact that Catarina had disappeared from his life. He did not feel very sorry: Catarina had never awakened any deep emotion in him. He had more important things to think about: he was expecting Philips.

Philips had already arrived in Italy. He was still tutor to the younger son of Richardot; but meanwhile he was diligently continuing the legal studies which he had started under the famous Justus Lipsius of Louvain. The father of his pupil had decided that Guillaume and Philips should settle first at Padua, as the Bo, the university there, was justly famous. And, while Philips would have found it difficult to travel to Rome, Padua was quite near Mantua. Philips arrived punctually on the agreed day.

The two brothers embraced with great affection. Family feeling was strong in both of them, but they would have been attracted to each other even if they had not been brothers—so similar were their characters. The superiority which a year's seniority had given Philips in their childhood had long since vanished. It was Pieter now who had the more self-possessed manner, the slightly protective tone. Philips was almost apologetic, a little clumsy, anxious for appreciation. But these differences were additional reasons for their liking each other. Both were also admirers of the classical spirit and unusually familiar with it. When their first greetings were over, they took each other by the shoulders and had a long look.

"You have grown quite a man," they both said, almost in the same breath.

They laughed. They were gratified that they resembled each other so strikingly, although Pieter had remained fair-haired and Philips's hair had grown dark. Arm in arm they climbed the stairs; they needed no servant to carry for them, for the future lawyer had brought little luggage for his brief visit. After they had sat down in Pieter's room and sent for some food, they could hardly wait to hear each other's news. Their first words were about their mother. Philips had heard nothing of her since he left, as he had been unable to send her his last address, but Pieter received frequent letters from her. Her health was good, although she complained that she was aging rapidly and grief had greatly shaken her—for Blandine had died. Philips already knew of this. They spoke with affection and regret of their beloved sister. But after that they passed on to the subject which interested them both most at the moment—Rome.

"Tell me all about your trip to Rome," Philips urged his brother. "I want to know every single thing."

"And I can hardly wait to tell you. Well, I started in July. The journey was terribly hot, but I didn't mind that. The cities I passed through were absolutely fascinating. Whenever I thought it worth while, I stopped for a few days. First in Parma. I really discovered who Correggio was there. Parma is full of his work. I stayed there only for two days, but I learned a great deal. There's a lightness of touch in the man's brush that I envy greatly. He has a wonderful gift for simplification. With a single stroke his drawing can sum up such a diversity of things that it makes you gape with wonder. And how he can paint flesh! What transparency! What fragility! It's impossible to give an idea of it . . . there's a sort of melancholy in his nudes. . . ."

"Wait a moment . . . Correggio . . . wasn't he the man who is supposed to have said: '*Anch' io sono pittore!*'?"

"Oh, yes, he said that all right. When he saw the Sistine Madonna of Raphael. He suddenly felt proud of his craft—that's why he cried out in delight that he, too, was a painter. Well, I had a lovely time in Parma. As I had no time I didn't stop in Modena, and I had no need to stop at Florence; I know it well enough, but I stayed a little while in Perugia. I studied Perugino there. I had heard something about him in Florence, but now, in his own town I really discovered him. He's by no means an

original artist. But his draughtsmanship is beautifully clear, and there's only one word for his style: charming. He taught me that even the largest composition has room for delightful detail. But aren't you bored? . . . I'm talking all the time about painters. . . ."

"Why not? Aren't you a painter? It's natural that you should be interested in your own craft."

"Yes. Well, one hot summer evening I arrived at Rome."

"And what were your feelings?"

"I can't describe it. It made me catch my breath. It was sunset when I reached the outskirts of the city. It was a strange sunset: crimson mixed with mysterious greens. I don't know whether you've noticed that sometimes at sunset the purple and golden clouds have a tinge of green. I saw the steeples and roofs of the city spread before me in that miraculous light. The road was very dusty; the sunset changed the dust into a frame shot with gold, red, and green, and through it I saw Rome. I was tremendously moved."

"And then? Tell me about the city itself."

"I can't. I understood why Rome is called eternal. All the periods of history are there, jumbled together. The Palazzo Venezia, a lovely grim palace, is a hundred and fifty years old; close by is San Marco, which was built in the fourth century. A little farther on there's the Campidoglio, the Capitol of the Romans. The Church of Maria d'Ara Coeli is built on the hill where the Sibyl of Tibur prophesied to Augustus the birth of Christ. Tibur is called Tivoli today. You can still see Horace's house on the slope of the hill. It's half a day's journey by coach from Rome."

"Tell me about itself, not the surroundings."

"I tell you, Rome can't be described. Rome is a sort of living history book, a gigantic tome filled with the engravings of every age. It's like the Infinite: its beginning is legendary, and it has no end. But you can't form a picture from my words; you must see it for yourself."

"I want to. I constantly urge my master Richardot to send his son and me to Rome. But now tell me about yourself. What did you do there and how did you get on?"

"Well, the first thing I did in Rome was to report to our Duke's representative. He was expecting me; he had been told of my arrival. He had taken quarters for me, so I went to my lodgings at once; it was in a house on the Aventino, the house of a friendly merchant family. The room

looked east; I had plenty of light, which I needed, but also plenty of heat in summer and cold in winter; more than I wanted. Well, then I called on Cardinal Montalto with the Duke's letter. The Cardinal is a very important person in Rome; he conducts the political affairs of the Holy See together with Aldobrandini, the Pope's nephew. I already knew Aldobrandini: he officiated at the wedding of Maria Medici and Henry IV. They were very busy when I arrived, sending money and troops to Emperor Rudolf to fight the Turk in Hungary. I knew all about the campaign, for our Duke was taking part in it. The papal forces were commanded by the Pope's brother. But he died suddenly at Varasd, and his army proceeded under a papal officer called Delfini to a place called Kanissa in Hungary, to join the forces of the Archduke Ferdinand. Our Duke was present at this stage of the campaign. He told me the terrible things that happened there: they couldn't provision the immense army, plague broke out, and half of the soldiers died—partly by plague and partly by starvation. The Pope lost his brother, five thousand men, and half a million gold florins, and the campaign was a failure. You see what a miserable thing war is. Hunger, plague, men dying in thousands—and why? For nothing. That proves, too, what I have always said. . . .”

“But Pieter, don't talk of war—talk of yourself.”

“Well, I called on Cardinal Montalto. At first he treated me rather coolly, but we began to talk, and he warmed up; he became so friendly that he sent the Duke a letter asking whether he could help me in any way. But he couldn't have done more than he did. He opened every door for me; I was allowed to see pictures and statues that are seldom shown to strangers. He kept a large house, entertained often, invited me frequently, and I acquired lots of interesting acquaintances—and a very good friend.”

“Oh yes, you wrote about him. A German. What's his name again?”

“Elsheimer. I met him the first time I visited the Cardinal and we became fast friends. He's from Frankfurt, and was on his first visit to Rome; he's a year younger than I am. He speaks very little, but he's a gentle and most likable fellow. We discovered at once that we had the same interests. He, too, had been brought up to love the classical spirit and become a painter. Later we found that we were alike in many ways. He likes to get up early and can't stand the air of drinking dens. So we joined company and that saved me from being involved in the Schilder-

bent. The Schilderbent—that's the name of the Dutch artist colony in Rome."

"So they have Dutchmen in Rome, too?"

"Of course. You can find there every nationality under the sun. Some of the Dutchmen I met. A man called Lastman was the most likable of them. But on the whole I tried to avoid them, for they made a virtue of going out every evening and getting drunk—and then the next day complaining that they had a headache and couldn't work or even look at pictures. We, Adam Elsheimer and I, worked hard enough and saw a great many paintings, sculptures, and buildings."

"Did you meet any Flemings?"

"Yes, one. An Antwerp man, Pauwel Bril. But as he has been living in Rome for twenty years he is almost an Italian. He's doing very well."

"Wait a moment. Weren't there two of them?"

"Yes, his brother Matthijs also lived in Rome and was astute enough to win the favor of the Vatican. When he died, the Pope turned over his commissions to the younger brother. At the order of the Pope, Bril painted a picture called '*Il martirio de San Clemente*' which I saw myself; it's sixty feet high. You can imagine the rest. He works regularly for Cardinal Montalto; one of the rooms in the Cardinal's palace is decorated by him.

"But to return to myself: my work was to copy a number of pictures for the Duke. Well, I can tell you, sometimes I thought that I was growing wings and flying away in pure bliss. I had to copy some detail of the murals in the Sistine Chapel. I spent unforgettable hours with these pictures, and I wouldn't have been surprised if I had vanished without a trace, absorbed by these miraculous paintings. Michelangelo, Raphael . . . oh, there are names for you. How I pored on their pictures, trying to discover the secret of their art! Raphael's pulsing movement passed into my blood, his swinging strength, his constant eyes for action. And the terrific storm that raged incessantly in Michelangelo's soul. . . ."

"What about the others? Didn't you like them?"

"Many were not modern enough for my taste. I encountered Fra Angelico again in the chapel of Nicholas V after seeing his work first in Florence. But I found someone who was modern enough even for me. He enchanted me. Caravaggio, he is called. This man has recreated for himself a whole world—a thing, of course, which every great artist does. For

him the world is pitilessly real with violent light and violent shadows. Have you ever seen any of his paintings?"

"No."

Pieter was surprised at first, but then remembered that he was not talking to a painter but to a lawyer. He lost some of his fervor, but he did not show his disappointment.

"Forgive me, Philips; I'm terribly inconsiderate. I am talking about technical questions to someone who isn't interested in them. I won't bore you any further—All I want to say is that in his handling of light and shadow, both important things in painting, Caravaggio interested me enormously."

"He interested you? In what way?"

"You misunderstand me, Philips. I haven't met him—only his work. I didn't try to get in touch with him, because those who knew him persuaded me not to. I've heard that he's quite mad. He either doesn't know or doesn't have any respect for social etiquette; if you don't approach him with humble reverence, he treats you like dirt. And I don't like intercourse with bad-mannered people. You remember, when I came back from Oudenaarde. . . ."

Philips smiled indulgently and said:

"Of course I remember: you wanted people to behave as if they were dancing an elegant ballet. But go on—tell me about yourself. The story about Richardot that you mentioned in your letter is still a bit obscure to me—although it's my master's son who. . . ."

"I'll tell you all about it. Early in my stay in Rome I visited your former pupil. He is the representative of the Archduke Albrecht in Rome—it would have been the right thing for me to visit him even if he hadn't been a former pupil of yours. I congratulate you on your pupil: he's a pleasant young man of good manners and distinguished appearance; it's easy to discern your handiwork. . . ."

Philips protested.

"It isn't because I taught him, but I must say. . . ."

"We became good friends, and, without any hint from me, he began to discuss my financial affairs. We came to the conclusion that it would be useful to get a profitable commission from the Archduke. Richardot had an excellent idea. But you must know about it. . . ."

"Yes, but not enough. I don't know the details. And as a philosopher

I hold that details are in most cases more important than the main problem. Tell me."

"Gladly. Let's start right at the beginning. You know that the Archduke Albrecht, while his brother Ernst was Governor in Antwerp, chose a career in the Church."

"Certainly."

"Well, afterward he left the Church and married the daughter of Philip II, Isabella of Spain. But what you probably don't know is that spiritually he was never able to liberate himself from the Church. He was Cardinal of Jerusalem or, to be exact, the Cardinal of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem; the church which gave him his title, a rather ramshackle building, was just outside the walls of Rome, near the San Giovanni Gate. When the Archduke married, he vowed that he would help this church as much as he was able. Richardot knew of this vow, and so did his son, your former pupil. Out of kindness to me, as your brother, he decided that it would greatly enhance the beauty of the church if I painted an altarpiece for it. He is very well informed on political questions. The Vatican was suspicious of the indulgent attitude of the Archduke toward Protestant Holland. The Holy See didn't realize that Albrecht wanted first to win over the Low Countries before bringing them back into the fold. It was to the Archduke's interest to demonstrate his loyalty to the Papacy and his willingness to make sacrifices. And this is where your pupil came in. He, as his Roman representative, wrote a letter to the Archduke, telling him that it would make a good impression if His Highness had an altarpiece painted for the Santa Elena altar of the Church of the Holy Cross. There was in Rome, he said, a young Flemish painter called Rubens, who was a modest fellow and would do all that was needed for one or two hundred gold pieces. The Archduke liked the advice and replied at once that 'this fellow Rubens' should start at once. That's how I came to paint this triptych."

"And was the altarpiece a success?"

"I don't know. You can decide for yourself."

Pieter got up and selected three of the numerous pictures placed against the wall.

"Look, these are the color sketches."

Philips looked at them with great interest.

"My opinion doesn't count for much," he said, a little priggishly, "but

I consider these to be masterpieces. Tell me more about them, if it doesn't bore you."

"Of course it doesn't. The centerpiece represents Santa Elena. I think it's quite good. This one is the Ecce Homo. I had a lot of trouble with it, especially with the colors, and I still think the coloring a little restless. But I think the main figure is well done. You can't see it in the sketch, but in the final version I tried to get into the head of the Savior an expression of infinite sorrow and wisdom. I think I succeeded fairly well. This is the other wing of the altar, called The Erection of the Cross. Frankly I'm not too satisfied with it. Perhaps I was thinking too much about Tintoretto while I was painting it. The colors are a little hard, the shadows uncertain, here on this side the red. . . ."

"Oh no, don't deprecate it," protested Philips. "I like it very much. . . . Why are you smiling?"

"I'm smiling at human vanity. I know very well all the faults of this picture, I know that I shouldn't accept your praise—and yet I enjoy it. . . . But let's talk about the altarpiece. Look at the three paintings together and try to catch the idea in them—not the subject of each but the general composition of the triptych. You know, it's just like mathematics, just like the multiplication table. For each picture has its own composition, yet the three together form another unity, a heightened, more complex one. . . . Excuse me for chattering like this about things which only interest the expert."

"Oh no, I could listen to you for days. So these pictures are already in the Church?"

"Yes, of course."

"I'm really proud of you, Pieter. A brother of mine has created something which is treasured in a church of the capital of the world. Do you know what I am thinking? When Father lived in Rome he must have visited that church. Perhaps he even stood in front of the little altar which had no painting to decorate it . . . and he had no idea that one day it would fall to his son to provide one, for the delight of the whole world. . . ."

"Poor Father. . . ."

The two brothers fell silent for a while, brooding over the past. Then Pieter replaced the three pictures, with their painted sides toward the wall. Philips said:

"Nothing more happened in Rome?"

"Nothing important. I spent a great deal of my time among the ruins of the Forum. I can hardly describe the exciting hours I had there. If you're persistent enough, you're bound to find something. I discovered several parts of some statue or relief, and they were of artistic value too. I found old coins, and a bronze object, a lamp, I think. I'll show you my collection while you're here and explain it to you. I keep my things in the next room—as a special favor the Duke granted me a second room. It's full of my Roman memories—but so am I. . . ."

It was late; the two brothers decided to go to bed. But, even after they had put out the lamp, they still talked, discussing the wonders of Rome, until they fell asleep.

Next day they got up early, and Pieter showed his brother over the palace of the Dukes of Mantua. He was indefatigable in expatiating on the pictures, statues, tapestries, trying to give his brother an idea of this wonderful place where Mantegna had spent the greater part of his life and where Donatello, Brunelleschi, Titian, and Romano had also been frequent visitors. He showed him the rooms where a Hohenzollern princess had lived as the wife of a Gonzaga. But the palace had also entertained the Queen of Denmark, the Elector John, Emperor Sigismund, even Pope Pius II himself, who had held one of his councils there. They inspected the armory, the theater, the collection of coins. But Philips was most interested in the books and manuscripts. Pieter was quite at home in the library and knew where the most interesting treasures were. He brought forth the lovely missals which had been copied and painted with many years of labor by the monks. He showed the rare French romances, the story of King Arthur and the Round Table, the histories of Tristan, Amadis, Astolpho, and Lancelot. He fetched out the luxurious editions of Cicero, the Golden Ass of Apuleius and all the other classical writers. Philips was tremendously excited by these. They looked at the hand-illustrated editions of Boccaccio and Dante. But Philips was even more thrilled by the archives. Here, too, Pieter knew his way about. He selected an old, faded letter from a bundle of manuscripts.

"Look, Philips. This letter was written by Francesco Gonzaga to his father, a hundred and thirty years ago. Perhaps you find it difficult to read the ancient writing; let me translate it. Listen:

"My greatly respected and glorious father—I think that I shall reach Bologna on the fifth or sixth of August, but I intend to stay there only for two or three days and then journey on to the healing springs. I beg Your Highness to command Andrea Mantegna and Malagista to accompany me. They shall amuse and console me, so that I may avoid sleep, which is what my cure demands. It will be a great pleasure to show Andrea the *gemmae*, the bronzes and other fine antiquities, which we shall examine and discuss together, while the music and singing of Malagista shall make my vigil easier.

"The rest isn't important. Wait a moment, I'll show you an even more interesting letter. Let's put this back first. So. Look at this one. Two servants of the same Duke Francesco went to Spain to buy some horses. This is what they wrote from Cadiz:

"A Savona sailor called Columbus has just made port. He has brought with him gold valued at thirty thousand ducats, pepper, and other spices, parrots shaped somewhat like a falcon. On his journey he saw trees which grew the finest cotton, while others produced wax and linen thread; he met tall, agile men resembling Tartars, whose hair reached to their shoulders. These are man-eaters and they fatten human beings as we fatten turkeys. They are called cannibals. The ships have brought an immense amount of gold, sandalwood, and spice. I saw with my own eyes sixty parrots of different colors, and twelve Indians, all gifts for the King. Columbus also discovered great forests, so dense that they almost hid the sky. There is much other interesting news, but I have no time to write of it."

Pieter went on rummaging among the letters to entertain his brother. Then he showed him the surroundings of the palace.

"If you like," he said, "we can have our horses saddled now and ride to the hills. The sunset is very beautiful from there."

Philips approved of the idea. They went to fetch the horses. Soon they were riding side by side out of the town, along the Mincio. They talked of Flanders, and mainly of the siege of Ostend. Philips related the stories he had heard: the Archduke Albrecht had decided to take the most important Protestant fortress, Ostend, which was called all over the country "a thorn in the leg of the Belgian lion." The siege had been long and so far unsuccessful. Princess Isabella had vowed that she would not change her shift until Ostend had been taken by the Catholics.

"And what is Maurice of Orange doing?" Pieter asked.

"They say that he is going to become King of Holland. Isn't it strange?

We are more or less stepbrothers, and now he is almost a king. But he is fighting bravely."

"Yes, he is fighting, so is the Archduke. Ravaging, killing, burning. Men who have been brought up with care and trouble by their parents are killed in a moment by a bullet. Houses, built with such affection, labor, and cost, are devoured by flames. Isn't it terrible? Have you, as a philosopher, ever considered the question of war and peace?"

"I have hardly ever thought of it."

Pieter paused and then turned to a different subject. He talked about Vergil. They had now reached the grass-grown slope of a hill. A small white house was near by.

"Let's rest ourselves and the horses for a little."

"Whose house is that?" Philips asked.

"I don't know to whom it belongs now. But I do know whose house stood here many centuries ago. That's why I brought you here."

Philips had stretched himself on the ground. Now he rose on his elbow.

"Tell me," Pieter continued, "do you remember Vergil's epitaph?"

"Of course. Every schoolboy knows the words: 'Mantua bore me, Calabria claimed me, the soil of Naples was my grave. I sang of shepherds, heroes, and of the country.' Oh yes, 'Mantua bore me.' So Vergil was born here. I never thought of that."

"Yes, he was born here—on the spot where that house is standing now. . . ."

Philips jumped to his feet.

"One of the greatest spirits of ancient times . . . here he ran about as a little boy . . . just where I am standing now. . . . Pieter, I am grateful for this. I can almost feel his ghost haunting this spot. Don't you admire him?"

Pieter shook his head.

"Poets, too, are responsible for wars. They glorify the murder of men. '*Cecini duces*.' He brags of it even in his epitaph. . . ."

Philips looked at him in amazement.

"You're a strange fellow, Pieter. I don't understand you."

"It doesn't matter—we're still good brothers. Let's talk of something else. Guess, what I've been thinking?"

"What?"

"When we go back to the palace, let us write together to mother."

"Splendid. I have to write some letters in any case. To Jan Wouwere, among others. You remember him?"

"Yes."

"Wouwere is at Bologna now. I want to visit him; it's a long time since we've met. He, too, studied law with Lipsius, and I haven't seen him since. You know what I'd like? If you would paint us together—Lipsius, Wouwere, yourself, and myself. A lasting memento of all of us."

"If it would give you pleasure—gladly."

They rode homeward slowly, side by side.

XI

When the Duke returned from the wars, Pieter was no longer the only Fleming at the court of Mantua. Duke Vincenzo had brought with him a small stableboy called Paul. Paul was an orphan; he had served a rich master and had had an adventurous life. The Duke had bought some horses, and the boy had apparently been thrown in with them. Pieter often visited the thirteen-year-old boy with the lively eyes and the gay temper whenever he felt he wanted to talk in his mother tongue. The boy adored him; and, when Pieter went on a long journey, it was not difficult for him to arrange for the stableboy to accompany him.

The Duke had decided to collect in his palace the portraits of the world's most beautiful women, and at the same time, as a sort of penance for this mundane idea, those of the most famous Madonnas. As he could hardly hope to obtain all the originals, he decided to have copies at least. Once more Pieter was received in audience every day, sometimes twice, for it fell to him to organize the extraordinary art collection. He had to draft letters for Chioppio to send to the Mantuan emissaries in the different capitals; they were to find good copyists and pay from fifteen to eighteen guilders for each copy. The Duke was excited by the whole idea and discussed it by the hour. Then one day, when Pieter entered the audience chamber, the Duke said:

"You will stop your present work. I am sending you on a new journey. Chioppio will tell you all about it."

He nodded kindly, signifying that the audience was over. Pieter hurried to the secretary.

"Sit down, my boy, and listen to me with patience; your mission is a most important one."

"Where am I to go?" Pieter asked.

"I'll tell you if you will listen—you *must* be patient. Let me begin by reminding you that Mantua, even under the glorious reign of the Gonzagas, is a very small state. Our foreign policy is simple but difficult: we must be on good terms with everybody. Our Duke, thank God, has a very

clear mind; he quite sees the point of advice and is gracious enough to act in accordance with it. All this you know. But let me come to the point. You must have noticed in Florence that the present head of the Medici House has broken with the traditional policy of his predecessors and turned against Spanish interests. You must also be aware that the Grand Duke Ferdinando's nephew-in-law is Henry IV, the greatest enemy of the Spaniards—while the same relationship binds him to our master."

"I begin to understand."

"I hardly think so. What is it you begin to understand?"

"The Papal State, the Spanish Viceroy at Naples, and Spain itself threaten Florence constantly. This may easily lead to war. It is not in Mantua's interest that Spain should identify her with the powers to which our ruler is related. Mantua must show its independence."

"Bravo, Pietro. I am proud of you. But don't interrupt me until I have finished. Our master has a representative in Madrid, a certain Annibale Iberti. We told him to discover who were the most influential personages at the Spanish Court, and next to inform us what kind of attention they would welcome most. His reply has arrived. In the first place, of course, the King must be flattered, and he is interested only in hunting and riding. At the Spanish Court everything depends on the Duke of Lerma, a most cultivated man. We must give him some knick-knack or other. He's greatly influenced by his sister, Countess Lemos, who is religious, and has a passion for religious works of art. Finally, there is Pedro Franchezza, one of the Duke's favorites, and very important. He is at present furnishing a new house—some handsome pieces of furniture would make a good impression on him. The Duke and I have discussed it all. We've decided to send the king a fine carriage and six of the finest stallions in the Mantuan stud, together with the two Polish grooms whom His Highness brought back from the war in Hungary. We are sending to His Majesty as well a splendid collection of muskets, eleven valuable pieces, and a crystal cabinet of rare perfumes. The Duke's sister is to have a rosary of precious stones and a jeweled crucifix. There are a Persian carpet and some charming little statues for Señor Franchezza. As for the Duke himself, we're sending him one golden and two silver vases filled with rare incense, also—and this will give him even greater pleasure—copies of the sixteen most famous pictures in Italy."

Pieter jumped to his feet.

"Sixteen? Those which Facchetti is now copying for us in Rome?"

"Yes. We should have them within a few days. Then we shall have to find someone to conduct all these presents to Valladolid, someone who speaks Spanish, who can deal with courtiers, whose head is screwed on the right way, and who won't be too conspicuous. Obviously we don't want the presentations to become common gossip. I mentioned you, and His Highness seemed to think you admirably fitted for the job. You're to leave next week. You will receive an ample supply of money to cover your expenses, letters of credit, and, of course, letters of introduction. The rest depends on you. Now, please, don't thank me. I suggest you return to your work. I have plenty to do myself."

On a dull March morning they set out: in front a cart loaded with chests filled with the presents; behind it the court painter and his servant on two of the stallions; then a mule cart with the luggage; then the Polish grooms leading two horses each; finally, the carriage drawn by post horses, with Paul, the Flemish stableboy, on the box.

The first halt was at Ferrara, where they were stopped at the toll gates. The officer demanded that the chests should be opened. A lengthy and heated argument followed, in the middle of which Pieter hurried off to Martellino, the banker, to whom he had a letter of introduction. That gentleman conducted him to a Count Langosco, whom he already knew. The three of them proceeded to the house of the Cardinal of Ferrara, who had, however, retired for the night. After some delay His Eminence agreed to write a letter to the officer, asking him not to insist on opening the chests. All this in pouring rain. But the chests were not opened, and the officer contented himself with imposing a duty of a hundred and fifty thalers. On that first day Pieter realized that he had been most inadequately supplied with money.

The next difficulty occurred at Bologna, where the same thing happened. But now Pieter could point out that, as the chests had not been opened at Ferrara, there was no reason why they should be opened in Bologna. He took the first opportunity to write to Chieppio: "If the Duke does not trust me, he has given me too much money; if he does trust me, he has given me too little."

Still in heavy rain they set out from Bologna for Florence. Hitherto the road had been flat, but now they began to traverse mountain paths and felt the full force of the weather. The mules grew refractory; the

vehicles stuck in potholes, the coachmen poured with sweat in spite of the cold and the rain. At last they reached Florence, but without the presentation carriage. That princely vehicle had become hopelessly bogged. It arrived in Florence next day, but the delay did not really matter, for it was impossible to continue the journey to Pisa, as the highway was flooded.

Pieter discovered next that the Mantuan courtier who had arranged the stages of the journey had been misinformed about the sea connection between Italy and Spain; he ought to have known that the regular service ran from Genoa and not from Leghorn. But it was now too late to make the long detour to Genoa. He would have to trust to luck to find a suitable boat at Leghorn. He was delayed six days in Florence waiting for the floods to abate, and then, after one day's journey, he arrived at Pisa. Here he lodged his men and found a safe place for his precious baggage. Then he hurried off to Leghorn. There were three Hamburg boats in the harbor which had been chartered by the Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici for the transport of Tuscan grain to Spain. Pieter at once went off in search of one of the captains. A bargain was soon struck with one of them, and Pieter rode back to Pisa, much relieved. He was surprised there to receive a visit from Jan van der Neesen, whom he had known since childhood in Antwerp, and whose house Philips had often visited. He was even more surprised when he learned that his old friend had come to him on behalf of the Grand Duke Ferdinando, in whose services he now was. As war seemed imminent and a naval attack on Leghorn probable in that case, the Grand Duke had come to Pisa to organize the defenses of the port. His Highness had a request for Pieter: he was presenting a horse to the Spanish Commander of Alicante; would Pieter take this beast along with the other horses, as the ship was going to that town in any case? Pieter was astonished to learn that the Grand Duke knew of his presence in Pisa and of the horses from Mantua. He made no comment, however, and expressed his willingness to fulfill the Grand Duke's request.

Three days later Pieter had another surprise. The Grand Duke invited him to an audience. After it was over, Pieter immediately wrote to Chieppio:

This afternoon the Grand Duke sent for me. He referred with the greatest politeness to our master. I must say that I was considerably

startled when His Highness spoke of the purpose of my journey, as well as of more personal matters. He actually informed me, with a certain complacency, that he knew who I was and what was the nature of my calling. I must confess I felt considerably flattered by such interest in my humble affairs in such high places. Even so, I could hardly conceal my surprise at the completeness of his information. Plainly some spectral presence has been at work in Mantua, or perhaps someone more tangible—although I hate to use the word “spy.” There is no other explanation how the Grand Duke could be so well informed, for I need not tell you that I have observed the utmost discretion while the presents have been in my charge. If I am displaying my ignorance of the sort of thing that happens at ducal courts, I beg you not to laugh at my simplicity. Forgive me, and read this with amusement as the letter of an inexperienced novice whose only desire is to serve his benefactors, especially you, my dear Messer Chieppio.

I am,

Your Excellency's humble and obedient servant,
Pietro Paolo Rubens.

It was April 8 before there was a favorable wind and the ship could set sail for Alicante. The horses and the mules were put in the hold; the men were quartered with the crew. The carts and the carriage were well secured on the deck. Pieter was given a small but comfortable cabin. Italy slowly sank under the horizon, and the ship rose and fell on the open sea. The voyage lasted twelve days. It was Pieter's first sea voyage; but he suffered from no more than a slight headache. He spent much of his time chatting with the German sailors, who were Protestants and rough fellows, but likable. He questioned them about their home life, their politics, their adventures at sea. When their conversation bored him, he went to inspect the horses and to ascertain that they were being washed down in white wine as the Duke had directed. This done, he would go on deck and observe the colors of the sky and the sea. He never missed sunset and sunrise, for now, as always, he retired and rose early.

On the last day of the voyage the weather grew worse. The vessel neared the Spanish coast in torrential rain. But at last palm trees could be seen. Unloading was a tricky business, for the tarpaulins which protected the presents were drenched with rain and sea water. The pictures, especially, required careful handling. These had been packed in tin boxes wrapped in oilcloth and stowed in a big wooden chest. Thus protected they had come through the voyage without harm. The horses, too, were

in excellent fettle. Only the stableboy seemed the worse for the adventure. He had succumbed to the ague and was half dragged, half carried down the gangplank in the pouring rain.

As far as his responsibilities permitted, Pieter tried quickly to accustom himself to the foreign atmosphere. He addressed everyone in Spanish and in spite of initial difficulties achieved a certain fluency on the first day.

It took three days to prepare for the next stage of the journey. The sick boy could not be left in Alicante, so Pieter had a place prepared for him in the cart, where he would be protected from the rain; for it was still raining with bleak monotony when the little procession set out to cross almost the whole breadth of the Spanish peninsula. Moorish minarets and Catholic churches rose among the white houses, and every flat roof was crowned with a stork's nest. Each evening the travelers found lodging in some filthy inn. The stableboy shivered continually and coughed. At last they reached Aranjuez, but Pieter was unable to view the famous palace; the guard refused to let him beyond the gate.

At Madrid, Pieter made a halt, for both men and beasts were exhausted. He visited several of the notable churches and the royal palace. He spent every free moment in sight-seeing; and, although time pressed, he managed to visit the Escorial, the palace of the grim and taciturn Philip. Generally speaking, he was not much attracted by the Spanish pictures he saw; the painters seemed to work to a *pasticcio* method, fashionable in Italy, but one for which he did not greatly care. But the work of one man did capture his attention, that of El Greco, a Greek from the Isle of Crete, whose real name was Theotocopoulos. He was obviously an artist of great originality.

Pieter stared at his work with a shock of surprise, and his first impression was that the man must have been insane; yet no one could deny the consummate artistic method in his madness. Color he used but sparingly; indeed he seemed to work chiefly in tones of gray and blue. To Pieter, fresh from Italy, his drawing was like a slap in the face. His figures were wildly out of drawing: hollow cheek bones, flattened skulls, twisted necks; they resembled specters more than saints or human beings. But the painter managed to organize his mad world of spirits so well that no one could deny his genius. Pieter's mind returned constantly to El Greco as his horse splashed over the rain-swept roads to Valladolid. The more he wrestled with the problem, the more he realized his own incapacity

fully to understand those paintings, and yet, indubitably, they were immortal.

After twenty days they at last arrived in Valladolid—an extremely wet and downcast little party. Pieter at once inquired where the Mantuan Resident was to be found. He was taken to an attractive little palace; but the Resident chose to keep him waiting for a considerable time before receiving him. That gentleman had a well-fed appearance and a closed face; his eyes were constantly half shut, so that he gave the impression of being in a perpetual doze. Pieter introduced himself and at once made known his mission.

"I am astonished that His Highness the Duke has sent me no notification of this matter," Annibale Iberti remarked with some heat.

"But I myself bring the notification," replied Pieter, somewhat surprised at the Resident's anger. "I shall show you my papers tomorrow, if you have any doubt about my identity. And the presents themselves should serve to explain the nature of my mission. I am instructed to hand them over to Your Excellency, so that you may facilitate their speedy presentation."

"Speedy presentation? That, my friend, will be a difficult matter. At the moment the Court is not in residence. Contrary to custom, it did not travel here from Aranjuez, but to Burgos."

"And when will the Court return?"

"I cannot say. But I shall take over the gifts tomorrow."

"I am not sure that you will be able to do so. The horses and some of the presents are here, but others have not yet arrived. However, I shall be glad to hand over tomorrow those that I have. I shall now have to impose upon your kindness. I need lodgings for my servants, and I am not familiar with the town. Yet this little expedition is now yours to command, and I therefore await your instructions."

Iberti's expression did not change.

"I shall expect you tomorrow at the stroke of ten. I will not detain you now as you must be fatigued by your long journey."

The two men bowed silently; they did not shake hands.

Next morning Pieter presented himself at the palace with the vases, the horses, the state coach, and his servants. Iberti casually glanced over them, his face remaining expressionless, whether he felt approval or disapproval. As he made exhaustive notes, the process of handing over the gifts took

two hours. Then Pieter was forced to raise the question of expenses. The journey had cost much more than the Mantuan officials had estimated, and toward the end he had been reduced to spending his own money. This problem involved a two hours' talk with Iberti. Each item on Pieter's list received minute scrutiny.

And now nothing remained to be done but to await the arrival of the cart and of the King. Consequently Pieter had plenty of time to himself. First he visited the churches. The Cathedral was a modern building, its marble walls still bare of pictures and statuary; but among the smaller churches there were many rich in the works of the Spanish masters.

At last the cart arrived, and its contents were taken to Iberti's palace. The rain had stopped, much to the relief of everyone. The tarpaulin was thrown off the cart and one by one the chests were borne into the palace.

"Which one contains the pictures?"

Pieter pointed to the largest chest, and Iberti gave orders that it should be opened first. Pieter saw with horror that the rain had penetrated through the wooden chest, the oilcloth, and even the tin boxes. The pictures were in a sorry state.

"What's this?" Iberti asked, his face a mask.

"It's awful. I should be hanged for this. What am I to do?"

One by one the pictures were examined. Not one had escaped the ravages of the rain: Pieter scrutinized them with profound attention, his heart thumping.

"I'll try to restore the pictures as far as I can," he said at last, coming to a sudden resolve. "I shall need your Excellency's help to obtain paint and other materials. There isn't a moment to lose; I shall begin work at once."

The paintings were quickly taken to his lodgings. He set up his easel and started on the first picture at once. He deftly patched the rotten parts of the canvas and scraped off the blistered and smudged paint. After an hour's work he saw that he would be able to make good the damage.

Two strange young men now appeared. They introduced themselves as artists and explained that Señor Iberti had sent them to assist him. Pieter was glad to have them. He gave them instructions, which, however, they received with a slightly supercilious air, and explained that they could not start work immediately, but would return tomorrow.

Pieter was up and at work by dawn. He had been working for five hours before the Spanish painters arrived. He again gave them instructions

and continued work on his own canvas with a feverish satisfaction. But the Spaniards had no intention of tiring themselves out. They worked slowly and without interest; they talked continually. After an hour or so they said they were hungry and went off to an inn; Pieter took the opportunity to stretch his legs and visit the sick stableboy. Still shivering violently, the boy lay on his pallet and smiled up at Pieter.

"Are you in much pain?" asked Pieter, bending over him.

"No," the boy whispered. "I feel better. I sleep a lot and dream of Antwerp."

Pieter stayed with him for a little while, stroking his head and joking with him. Then he hurried back to his easel. Some time later his Spanish assistants returned and began elaborate preparations for resuming work. At that moment Iberti entered.

"I have news," he said, with his eyes half shut. "The Court arrives tomorrow. You must hurry."

"I shall do what is humanly possible," replied Pieter, without stopping work.

He worked till dusk. Next morning he decided that two pictures were almost wholly unspoiled; twelve could be restored; but two were completely ruined. He decided at once to paint two pictures to replace them. For some time he had had two subjects in mind: the sages Democritus and Heraclitus. He worked with fierce energy, without pausing for food or rest, till evening. But he sent away the two Spanish painters.

"Why did you do that?" asked Iberti, dumbfounded.

"Because they are lazy; also they are chatterboxes. It is hardly in our interest that the story should go round the town that the pictures were damaged. Leave the work to me, Your Excellency. You have responsibilities enough."

"Indeed, yes. But I have been in touch with Calderon, the Court Marshal. He has promised to arrange audiences at an early date. Count Orgaz, the Master of the Horse, has already seen the state coach and horses. He is enchanted. So you must hurry."

Pieter worked on, filled with pride in his own skill. That day he completed the work of restoration and began on the two original paintings. Everything in the two pictures was clear in his mind.

He labored furiously for several hours and then, by way of relaxation, visited the sick stableboy again. The poor boy was lying motionless and

at first looked as if he were asleep. But, when Pieter bent over him to listen to his breathing, he saw that he was dead. His face was peaceful, almost happy. And Pieter remembered how the lad used to dream of Antwerp. He sat for a long time beside his bed. At last he rose, covered the dead boy's face, and sent a message to Iberti begging him to see that Paul was given a burial worthy of a ducal employee.

"How is your work proceeding?" Iberti asked when he called the next day.

"Everything will be completed by tomorrow."

"Bravo! But, in a way, it's a pity you have hurried so much."

"I beg your pardon?"

"We cannot present the pictures just now. The Duke of Lerma's wife died last night. I hope you aren't annoyed that I pestered you so much."

"By no means, sir. I shall offer up a prayer in thankfulness for this fortunate delay. The pictures will take some time to dry."

"Of course. I didn't think of that. But we shall soon be presenting the coach and horses to His Majesty. Your attendance will be necessary, and I shall notify you of the day as soon as I can. And I mustn't forget to give you detailed instruction in the court etiquette."

"I shall be most grateful for your advice, but I can assure you that I shall not disgrace Your Excellency."

Pieter had now plenty of leisure. The arrival of the Court had thronged the little town with soldiers and luxurious carriages. The streets were crowded. The palace was now open, and Iberti arranged for Pieter to be shown over it. He found some fine examples of the work of Raphael and Titian, as well as some remarkable Spanish paintings. He became acquainted with one or two courtiers, among them Don Jeronimo Ayanza, the Treasurer of the Spanish West Indies, a man learned in the natural sciences. He was also something of an inventor, and was particularly proud of a pair of silver scales which, when immersed in water, indicated the proportions of the two metals in an alloy. Don Ayanza took an immediate liking to the young Flemish painter and invited him to dine. Pieter displayed such perfect manners that he received three more invitations. He often took a walk through the town with his acquaintance, who was able to point out the more interesting sights, the distinguished personages, the court beauties. Once he saw an old man with a maimed

left hand; he walked alone, lost in thought. His companion remarked that he was a retired naval man and author, called Cervantes.

Soon Pieter had a wide circle of acquaintances, mostly rich merchants and civil servants who could not yet call themselves *grandees*. His friends often talked about the King. His Majesty was a little younger than Pieter, just turned twenty-five. He was described to Pieter as a tall, flabby, fair-haired young man, the complete opposite of Don Carlos, his brother, who had died so mysteriously. Yet strict education had apparently been very effective in his case, and he was so religious by nature that he had never, according to gossip, committed even a venial sin. He was married to Margaret of Austria, and the marriage was a happy one. Apart from her, he loved only the Church and court display; he cared little for politics, leaving the management of both home and foreign affairs almost entirely to the Duke of Lerma. The Duke, for his part, not only took delight in affairs of state for their own sake, but jealously guarded his own interests. Don Sandoval y Rojaz, Duke of Lerma, was on the threshold of the sixties. In his love of pomp and luxury he surpassed even the King; he spent vast sums on his amusements and whims; and, when those who thought themselves in the know compared his income with his expenditure, there was usually a significant silence. Pieter could well imagine how the Spanish Empire was governed: The Duke made perfunctory reports to his royal master from time to time, received a bored nod, and then interpreted his instructions, if he had any, as he thought best. Lip service having been paid to the monarch, the Duke held the Empire in his hand. It was he who gave audiences to high officials of Church and State and foreign diplomats, audiences in which every word had weight and significance, in which amiability cloaked malicious intrigue, and a gay exchange of ideas was the glittering mask under which was concealed a battle for power. Pieter reflected that if it were known that he had a good brain, was a linguist, had a courtly appearance, and took a lively interest in politics, he could ask for nothing better than to become a diplomat. But why should a poor painter eat out his heart for such things? They were the prerogative of men of noble blood. And yet, and yet, could not a man with brains and talent achieve such a position, even if one's birth stood in the way? The life of courts and aristocrats, of receptions, polite witticisms, and all that, was merely a background to the settlement of the affairs of the world! Pieter felt he must share that life. He must!

The Court Chamberlain fixed July 11 as the date on which His Majesty would receive the presents from the Duke of Mantua. And on the following day the Duke of Lerma would give his audience.

Pieter prepared himself in great excitement for his reception by the King of Spain. Iberti gave him money that he might dress himself in a manner befitting the occasion. For the scene of the presentation a large garden on the outskirts of Valladolid had been chosen, where the coach and horses could be shown off to advantage. Iberti, Pieter, and the other members of the Mantuan party were in the garden long before the appointed time. The horses stamped impatiently in the sand, the gilded coach glittered in the sunlight; on a table with a velvet cover lay the curiously fashioned muskets and the other gifts. At last the sound of wheels was heard approaching. From the first carriage stepped four dignitaries. They did not even greet Iberti but immediately sank on their knees before the second carriage, in which were the King and Queen. If Philip, King of Spain, had not been born to the purple, he would have been taken for a fat, fair fool. A feeble-looking straw-colored mustache hung from his upper lip; his face was unhealthily pale. His wife, obviously suffering from the heat and fanning herself continually, stood by his side. Except for the royal couple, everyone in the garden was bent double. His Majesty looked round vacantly and nodded to no one in particular. Then the bent figures straightened again but took care to avoid drawing nearer than the prescribed distance. Iberti stepped forward, bowed deeply three times, and, on receiving a gesture of permission, began to speak. In a brief oration he presented the gifts of the Duke of Mantua, and begged the King to inspect them; whereupon that monarch turned impetuously toward the table and examined the weapons with great delight. He looked less kingly than ever.

"Lovely, Iberti, lovely! Oh, I'm so pleased."

For some moments he fondled the muskets, and then gave permission for the horses to be led past. This was done, and the King clapped his hands with joy. The royal couple then entered the state coach, the driver whipped up the horses and drove round the garden once at a smart pace. The King and Queen laughed and waved to Iberti as the coach passed him. After this the courtiers, who had been standing at a respectful distance, approached the King. Pieter was now about six paces from Philip,

and three paces in front of him Iberti bowed with great humility as the King expressed his appreciation of the presents.

"I shall report to my master, the Duke, Your Majesty's kind appreciation."

"Do so, Señor Iberti, and do not forget to inform His Highness that the Queen, too, was enchanted."

There was a moment's pause. Pieter held himself in readiness. But Iberti continued to stand stiffly before the King. The Duke of Lerma glanced at Count Orgaz, and the King at the Duke of Lerma. The royal party was obviously on the point of leaving. Pieter wanted to shout: "Be quick, be quick, Iberti, they're going," but he stood, dumbly waiting for the presentation that did not come. Then the King said:

"Well, then, I think. . . ."

He offered his arm to the Queen and nodded to Iberti. The royal couple, accompanied by the Duke of Lerma, Count Orgaz, Iberti, and the courtiers, walked slowly toward their carriage. Pieter Paul Rubens, the painter from Antwerp, stood unnoticed on the grass. As soon as the carriage had left, Pieter, flushed with indignation, hurried to Iberti, and said:

"Why didn't you present me, Your Excellency?"

Iberti regarded him sleepily.

"Because there was no opportunity."

"No opportunity? What about when the King. . . ."

Iberti calmly raised his hand and said:

"These things are determined by court etiquette. Good-by, Señor Rubens."

He turned on his heel and walked away. Pieter stared after him in astonishment. He now realized what he had half suspected for some time: this man Iberti was jealous of him. When Pieter told him he had met this or that dignitary, he had always listened in angry silence. His experience today showed that Iberti would not hesitate to put obstacles in the way of his advancement. As he saw the affair in a clearer light, Pieter's anger left him. He would send a polite note to Mantua, telling how Iberti had treated him. But meanwhile he would do nothing to precipitate a quarrel.

The Duke of Lerma's audience was very different. Pieter and Iberti went together to the palace of the real ruler of the Empire. Pieter was astonished by the luxury around him. When he reached the audience

chamber, he began to direct the servants how to display the presents to the best advantage; a number of chairs were arranged in a semicircle and the sixteen pictures leaned against them, while a table was placed in the middle, and the other gifts laid out upon it. The effect was sumptuous, and even Iberti nodded his appreciation. A moment later a lackey opened the double doors, and the Duke entered. He was wearing a dressing gown, apparently in the belief that this was a suitable garb for receiving the diplomatic representative of a friendly power on a visit of such a personal nature. The gifts at once caught his eye, and his surprise and pleasure were so great that for some moments he forgot to greet his visitors.

"Wonderful," he remarked with quiet astonishment. "These are indeed princely gifts."

Then he greeted Iberti, while Pieter stood motionless. The Duke sent him a questioning glance, but still he did not move. At last the favorite turned to Iberti.

"Permit me to present to Your Highness the man who brought the pictures. Pedro Pablo Rubens, court painter."

Pieter bowed smoothly and easily. The Duke shook hands with him.

"I'm glad you're a painter. I'm greatly interested in art. We must have a talk; but first let us examine the pictures."

He inspected them one by one and stopped for some time before one of the copies by Facchetti.

"Oh, but this must be an original."

Pieter glanced quickly at Iberti, who brusquely nodded to convey that the Duke must not be contradicted. Pieter remained silent. The Duke pointed to another picture.

"That is an original, too. You cannot deceive my eye," he exclaimed. "Indeed only one or two are copies. Tell your master that his present has enchanted me and that, in token of my gratitude, I shall be happy to do him any service. Who painted these two sages?"

"I did," said Pieter.

"Then you're a fine painter, sir. Tell me your name again."

"Rubens."

"Rubens? Where do you come from?"

"Flanders. I am a citizen of Antwerp."

"Oh, Flanders. Then you're a subject of Spain. Excellent. Iberti, you must let me have his man."

"Unfortunately, Your Excellency, Señor Rubens is not mine to give. Only this I can promise: as long as he is in Valladolid you may use his services as you think best."

The Duke nodded. Neither he nor Iberti gave Pieter another glance. They might have been hunting men agreeing to exchange a favorite dog. The Duke seemed about to say something, but Pieter began quickly:

"I am happy that my dearest wish is to be granted. I shall be honored to serve Your Excellency; and I am delighted that the arrangement meets with the approval of Señor Iberti. It is true that my master, the Duke of Mantua, had other plans for me; but, if Señor Iberti has no objection, as I have none, I shall be proud to receive Your Excellency's orders."

Iberti's features did not change, but Pieter could feel the anger boiling within him. Pieter's orders from the Duke of Mantua had been to obtain permission to copy the many portraits of women which graced the Spanish royal palace. Iberti knew this, but now he realized that the entire responsibility for the change rested on his shoulders. In his effort to win the favor of the Duke of Lerma, he had placed himself in an extremely awkward position. The Duke spoke, thus making it unnecessary for Iberti to compromise himself further. He turned to Pieter.

"I am most grateful for Señor Iberti's kind compliance with my request. And now I should like to discuss with you the details of your new duties."

Pieter's eyes flashed. The moment for revenge had come. He said smoothly:

"I am at Your Excellency's service. But I do not wish to waste Señor Iberti's time with a discussion of my poor paintings. I shall await Your Excellency's orders."

"I have no wish further to impose on Señor Iberti's time." The Duke turned to the Resident. "Please convey my heartfelt gratitude to your master for his magnificent present. And, Rubens, you stay with me."

Iberti's face went a shade paler. He doffed his plumed cap and withdrew. The Duke did not wait for the door to close behind him, before he said to Pieter:

"My poor wife's death has shaken me terribly. If you had come here some weeks ago I should have asked you to paint for me scenes of love and pleasure. But I have renounced worldly things. I have determined to become a lay brother, and it is as a monk that I shall continue to guide

the destinies of the Empire. But some reminder of my old life I must have. I want you to paint for me a portrait of myself on horseback, my Flemish friend, a portrait of me as I used to be."

He familiarly put his hand on Pieter's shoulder.

XII

Iberti now recognized the full extent of his blunder. For not only had Pieter's orders been to copy certain of the portraits in the Spanish royal palace, but to return to Italy by way of Paris so as to copy some paintings there, too. The position was delicate, and he could not compromise his master, the Duke of Lerma, or himself, by asking for the court painter's return. Iberti was disturbed.

Pieter, on the other hand, was overjoyed by the turn events had taken. He was on fire to begin work; and, if painting at night were possible, he would have started then and there.

But the Duke evidently did not consider the matter urgent. Pieter was graciously dismissed, and for some days he heard nothing from his new master. Then one day he received a summons. But the Duke, to his disappointment, said nothing about the portrait.

"You, *flamenco*," he said, without further ado, "paint me the twelve apostles."

"I beg Your Highness's pardon?"

"You heard what I said. Paint me the twelve apostles—not one picture, but twelve. I am redecorating one of my smaller rooms, and removing the tapestries there to a more suitable place. You may inspect the place—my chamberlain will show you it and supply you with any materials you may require. And you may start work at once. I should prefer you to work here, in the palace."

He then dismissed him. That same day Pieter moved his belongings to the palace. He was given a small garret in which to sleep; he spent the hours of daylight in the room for which he was to paint the apostles. He worked on wood.

He thought long over each face, especially at night as he lay in bed. Each morning he spent the first half hour or so in making sketches from ideas of the night before. And, when he paused for rest or refreshment during the day, he carefully watched every face he saw in the hope of finding some trait that he needed. He had soon finished the twelve

sketches. These were drawn in ink and elaborated in water colors. They were in themselves finished pictures, for his fastidious taste forbade him to leave his sketches in a slipshod or slovenly state.

But the next day, as he was about to set to work, the chamberlain informed him that the Duke would be leaving Valladolid the following day.

"Where for?" he asked, in surprise.

"For Ventosilla. But, of course, you don't know where Ventosilla is. It's a pretty little village about fifteen miles from here, where His Highness has one of his castles. The Duke and Duchess of Savoy are to be entertained there. Their Majesties have also been invited, and one or two ladies and gentlemen of the Court. I am instructed to inform you that at Ventosilla you will be required to paint His Highness's portrait. Perhaps it would be better to send your things on ahead today. Is there anything else you want to know?"

"Yes. Is the Resident of Mantua to be among the guests?"

"No. Both His Highness and his guests wish to enjoy themselves in complete freedom and take a rest from foreign politics."

Pieter at once called on Iberti to inform him officially of his removal to Ventosilla. The Resident maintained his customary impassive calm when he heard the news, but Pieter saw his face change color. He nodded.

"I wish you a pleasant holiday. As soon as you return, will you be good enough to report to me here?"

That was all that passed between them. Pieter reached Ventosilla early next morning. As the guests had not yet arrived, he had time to look around the summer palace. It had many patios; rooms and halls alternated with open courts. The multicolored marble floors were strewn with sumptuous oriental carpets, and the furnishings were light, as befitted the place.

After inspecting the palace, Pieter occupied himself with arranging his studio, which was not in the main building. He then began work on Peter, a white-haired old man, looking heavenward, his eyes filled with faith, his brow heavy with responsibility, a cross on his cloak, a key in his hand. At sunset, when the heat had grown less oppressive, he heard the guests arriving. He looked out of the window and saw horses with golden trappings, state carriages, members of the palace guard, Moorish servants with gilt earrings. But he did not go down into the courtyard.

He had no desire to be taken for a gaping yokel. His dinner was brought to him, but he ate little. He put the fruit aside for his breakfast and went to bed. During the night he awoke from a deep sleep. Moonlight flooded his room with almost the day's radiance; stringed instruments sounded softly, mysteriously. At first he thought he was dreaming. Then he got out of bed and went to the window. The summer night was like a fairy scene; the leaves of the trees had a silken sheen; the palace gleamed like silver. Through an open window he could see figures dancing. He recognized none of them, but admired their elegant and courtly movements.

"Court life. . . ." he murmured as he watched.

He smiled sadly and went back to bed. Soon the music lulled him to sleep.

For two days he painted the apostles. The Duke seemed to have forgotten him completely. But the third day he entered the studio unannounced. He was wearing a black breastplate, an uncomfortable garment in the noonday heat.

"Have you finished any of the apostles?"

"The sketches are completed. I have finished Peter, and today I began work on James the Elder."

"Excellent," said the Duke, hardly giving the pictures a glance. "But let us leave the apostles. My guests are resting, and I have stolen half an hour for myself. Begin my portrait at once. Why do you look so surprised? I shall choose a horse later and you can paint it separately. First paint me, and then put me on the horse. Well, begin, begin."

Pieter made no protest. He asked the Duke to be seated, selected a pose, and began to draw. The Duke had an interesting head: the skin of the face waxen pale, the pointed beard still black, the eyes haughty and daring.

"How do you think of the composition as a whole?"

"I thought of a meadow with flowers, and a bright blue sky as background."

"Impossible. Don't you see this breastplate? Paint me as a soldier. Put me on horseback on the top of a hill. The sky must be stormy, and the background must consist of cavalry massed for attack. Please follow these instructions faithfully."

"Very well, Your Highness."

"Good. And see that you work quickly, for I may tell you that I shall be able to sit only at infrequent intervals and for only a short time."

"Very well, sir."

"Don't bother with my breeches now. I'll send them up to you later. Concentrate on my face."

Pieter worked intently for a quarter of an hour. Then the Duke jumped to his feet, strode to the window, and glanced toward the palace.

"I knew they would bring out the wrong horses," he exclaimed angrily.

He hurried from the room. Pieter worked hard on the sketch. Then he put it aside and returned to James the Elder. An hour later a Morisco lackey brought him the Duke's gold-cloth breeches and the black breast-plate. Pieter stared at them helplessly. What was he to do with them? How could he make a composition out of a confusion of bits and pieces? How was he to arrange the light and shadow? His Highness was, apparently, a patron of art—that was why he had been given these pictures as presents. Pieter turned again to the apostles. James the Elder, he represented as a strong, wiry, swarthy peasant. John was an ethereal young man, with particularly beautiful hands which, as he was holding a chalice, showed to great advantage. Pieter was least satisfied with Thomas. But it chanced that one day as he was taking a walk he saw a Morisco couple gathering fruit. They must be sister and brother, he concluded, for they were very alike. "I have found my Thomas," he told himself. As he approached them, the woman turned to the man and said something, and the man replied slowly and doubtfully. Yes, he had found his Thomas. He stopped and spoke to them. They spoke Spanish quite well. He inquired who they were, and whether they had time to sit for him. The man's name was Rosteh, the girl's, Zaida. A mere child, he thought; but he discovered that at sixteen she was a widow and the mother of two children. At last Pieter overcame their suspicions, and they promised to come to his studio to sit for him.

Next day sister and brother appeared. He drew the boy quickly, softening his Moorish characteristics, but retaining his beautiful eyes. He gave him some money and then turned to Zaida.

"I have no time to draw you now. Can you come tomorrow?"

Zaida, who was staring spellbound at the drawing of Rosteh, nodded. She gave Pieter an unequivocal glance and seemed reluctant to go.

"Or you may come tonight," said Peter softly. "I can draw you by moonlight, too."

The girl nodded and abruptly ran away. That night she slipped into his room. She did not wait to be wooed, but shut her eyes at once and flung back her head. Pieter took her in his arms. After that she often came to his room.

Some days later Pieter received word that the horse had been chosen. It was a white horse, a noble animal. Pieter led it to a grassy hillock in the park. He placed the horse and rider under a tree, with the light coming a little from the left and from below. Every day he took his easel to the clearing and worked there. With deft assurance he sketched the horse, the rider, and the tree. Shortly afterward, when the Duke had time for another sitting, he found the picture half finished. He nodded in surprised appreciation.

"Unbelievable," he exclaimed. "You're a man after my heart."

The Duke sat down and assumed the attitude which had been chosen for the portrait. The white ruff and the outlines of the head had been drawn at the previous sitting. Pieter could now concentrate on the face. This time the Duke stayed longer, and he promised that he would come again the next day. But he did not, and sent a message to say that he had left for the Escorial with the King and Queen but would return in a few days to entertain the remaining guests. In the meantime, would the *flamenco* add a Jesus to the twelve apostles.

Pieter had now work in abundance. The picture of Thomas was finished, and the others came one by one: cheerful, bald, old Bartholomew; gentle, shrewd Mark; Matthew, pious and humble; Paul with his piercing eyes. And now he brooded on the personality of the Savior.

"Are these your holy men?" asked Zaida, curiously.

"Yes, child. I am surprised you've never heard of them."

"My holy book is the Koran," she said simply.

"What, aren't you a Christian?"

"Yes, I am a Christian. But only because we were forced to be baptized."

Pieter was a pious Catholic, and this confession startled him.

"It is said we are to be driven away from here," said Zaida.

"We? Who? And from where?"

"We, the Moriscos, are to be driven from Spain. Because we love the

Koran. That is our crime. Rosteh has already been punished. The chief gardener caught him reading the Koran and had him whipped. My uncle who lives near Pedrosillo has been murdered."

"Why?"

"Because a monk preached against him. The peasants grew angry. That is why we fled here. But we shall be driven from here, too. Rosteh overheard two gentlemen saying in the park that it is the wish of the Archbishop of Valencia, and the King does everything the Archbishop tells him."

The little Morisco woman spoke without a trace of complaint, like a servant who takes beatings as a matter of course. But then she added:

"I don't care what happens to me, so long as they don't kill me. I'm only sorry I shall not see you any more."

And she laid her black head on Pieter's breast. She paused and then said:

"I feel you don't love me today."

"Of course I do. But I'm tired. I've been working too hard."

Zaida disengaged herself, whispered some words of farewell, and slipped away. Pieter was surprised to find that he felt relieved.

Next day he received a visit from Cristobal, one of the Duke's stewards.

"*Señor*, has Zaida, the Morisco girl, been visiting you?" he asked, coming straight to the point.

"Yes. I sketched her. But is that so important?"

"It isn't important for me, but it is for you. His Highness is a strict Catholic. When it comes to his ears that anyone employed by him is amusing himself with Morisco women, he is apt to take a serious view of the matter."

"I'm grateful for your warning, *Señor Cristobal*. The favor of His Highness is of supreme importance to me. But I've received nothing but kindness from that poor creature. I cannot simply drive her away."

"There is no need to speak of driving her away. That has been done already."

"Indeed. In that case, please do me a great favor, *señor*. If she will accept it, give her this money from me."

Cristobal laughed as he took the silver talers.

"If she will accept it," he echoed. "You must certainly be a stranger

here, *Señor flamenco*. But don't take my words amiss. You can't have had much experience of women even in your own country."

The steward went away cheerfully, and Pieter resolved to think no more of Zaida. He had just received a letter from his mother, full of news of Antwerp. Vaenius had been elected president of the St. Luke Guild. Martin Vos was dead. The Archduke's armies were still besieging Ostend, and Princess Isabella had still not changed her shift.

War, always war. Ostend was besieged by Spanish soldiers. Perhaps some of them came from this part of Spain. And their master was that Spanish King whom he could have seen every day if he had watched the palace closely enough. Here music sounded and the King danced, while far away on a northern shore men killed one another at his orders.

Again his mind wrestled with the problem of war, but it was in vain that he looked to the holy apostles for guidance. They took no notice of him though he had given them life. Not even the Son of God, whom he had fashioned with great labor, could help him. He had wanted to paint the face of a man superhuman and divine, a man for whom there were no mysteries, for whom any miracle was possible. But, after three attempts, he had to acknowledge failure. Instead he had painted a pleasing and effective Christ for his noble patron.

By the time he had completed the thirteen pictures, the Duke of Lerma returned. He sent word to Pieter that work on the portrait was to be immediately continued.

The day after his arrival the Duke visited the studio. He was accompanied this time by one of his guests, a lady whom Pieter recognized as the Duchess of Infantado. The Duke presented the painter to her and said:

"*Flamenco*, you are not to continue work on my portrait at present. You are to paint the Duchess. She is soon going to leave us, and this portrait will be my parting gift. I shall be here while she sits and have the pleasure of monopolizing her society. Start at once."

Pieter gladly obeyed. The Duchess was wearing for the occasion a rich brocaded bodice and dress; her hair was piled high in conformity with the fashion of the day. She had pearl earrings, a string of pearls round her neck, and another string of very fine pearls which rested on her shoulders. She was not a beauty, but her skin was white and smooth, her eyebrows delicately formed, her mouth small and luscious. While Pieter

worked, the others talked. He listened intently; but, although he understood every word, he could not follow the meaning of their conversation. He felt unhappy, like a small boy who looks through a window and sees other children enjoying themselves.

The Duchess soon tired. And indeed it must have been uncomfortable to wear her heavy court finery, sitting, as she was, in a somewhat cramped and artificial posture. The next sitting was arranged for the following afternoon. Pieter worked on her portrait every day for a week. On the last day the Duke did not come to the studio; the Duchess was accompanied by her duenna. The latter took a chair in a corner and soon began to doze.

"So we shall finish today?" the Duchess asked.

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Do people always give you as many sittings as I have done?"

"That depends on the person. If I am to see behind a face, I need a good few."

"Pray, explain yourself. I have never been painted before. What do you mean: to see behind a face?"

"It isn't the task of an artist merely to copy a face, but to reveal a human being," Pieter replied.

"But to do that surely you must know him or her."

"Exactly, Your Highness. That is why I require several sittings."

The Duchess laughed a little mockingly.

"So now you know me?"

"That is my job, Your Highness."

"Indeed. Extremely interesting. And what do you see?"

"Only what I am permitted to see," Pieter replied calmly. "Delicacy and piety."

"Oh. And nothing else?"

"Perhaps, with all due respect, I may mention a taste for banter."

The Duchess laughed, and then became serious.

"You haven't seen the most important thing. Loneliness. Paint that too, *señor*, if you have the time."

"I have already done so," replied Pieter quietly. "Your beautiful gauze collar in its wire frame makes you bend your head slightly. But I have found another explanation for that. Your head bends forward like that of a solitary."

"I must see," said the Duchess eagerly.

She rose and stepped behind him. He jumped up at once. She looked attentively at the picture and then straight into the painter's eyes.

"Yes. You know I am a lonely woman."

"I'm afraid I've gossiped so freely about Your Highness with my brush that soon the whole world will know you as well as I do."

"Not the whole world. Only those who can read a portrait—and we are few."

Pieter blushed scarlet. Her use of the word "we" gave him inexpressible joy. The Duchess returned to her chair and assumed her former attitude.

"Speak of yourself, *señor*. I know pictures, but not painters; I know poems, but not poets. What sort of people are you?"

Pieter blushed again, but this time at the veiled insult. He turned over in his mind a retort which would be at once respectful and pointed. But the words froze on his lips. The Duke entered the studio.

He greeted the Duchess and then went straight over to the portrait. He examined it closely for a moment and clapped the painter heartily on the back.

"Excellent. I knew I could leave the task to you." He turned to the Duchess. "And now I must take you away, Your Highness. Our friends are expecting us."

The Duchess rose, but on reaching the door she gave Pieter a glance that made his heart leap. What did it signify? The bold coquetry of a bored woman, or a serious invitation? Who was this woman, and why was she anxious that he should know she was lonely?

That afternoon the Duchess came for a final sitting, this time accompanied by the Duke. Pieter had little left to do.

"It happens that I have hurried you without reason," the Duke remarked to Pieter. "The Duchess has decided not to leave at present; she will be able to see my portrait finished."

Pieter worked deftly, but he felt as if he were on fire. Why had this woman changed her mind so suddenly and decided to stay? No, no, he could not afford to risk his self-respect. It would be different if he were in love with her. He determined there and then to look to himself. He would not fall in love with any woman unless he could marry her.

"The picture is finished, Your Highness." He rose and bowed. The

Duke clapped him on the shoulder. The Duchess praised his work in the most friendly manner. And when she left she gave him another searching, beseeching glance. Pieter stared for a moment at the closed door. Then he put the portrait to dry, face to the wall.

The Duke of Lerma gave Pieter two more sittings for his portrait. He actually mounted the white horse and remained motionless in the saddle for ten minutes. After the last stroke of the brush, Pieter stepped back, surveyed the picture and shook his head. It was beautiful but bad. It was certainly effective, but an expert eye would at once detect its lack of cohesion. He shrugged his shoulders. There was nothing he could do to improve the portrait, and to paint another was out of the question.

The Duke, however, was enchanted. He liked especially the stormy clouds and wind-swept mane of the horse.

"Although I have no new work for you," he said, "I should like you to stay, here a little longer. You will be given some money today."

"I thank Your Highness, but my master, the Duke, is urging me to return. Apparently his need of me is so great that I am not to return by way of Paris, as was originally intended, but to travel straight to Mantua. With your permission, therefore, I should like to leave for Valladolid tomorrow, report to Señor Iberti, and set out on my journey at once."

"Iberti? You'll find him still there but don't report to him. Your master has recalled him. The new Resident is Señor Bonatti. A few days ago he presented his credentials to me."

"Iberti superseded?" said Pieter in astonishment.

"Yes. The Duke of Mantua evidently thinks he was lacking in some way. Well, good-by. If at any time you revisit Spain, you can count on me."

On a cold November morning Pieter set out from Ventosilla. As he left he found a bouquet of red flowers before the window of his room. Who could have put it there? The Duchess, or the little Morisco girl? He was still pondering the matter as he stepped into the carriage.

XIII

When he reached Mantua, the accounts of the journey were carefully checked and found in order. Vincenzo made Pieter talk for hours about the externals and niceties of Spanish court life. He was obviously satisfied with his painter. Pieter thought this a good opportunity to put his relations with the Duke on a sounder financial basis. He politely suggested that in future he should receive more regular remuneration for his work and that some kind of written agreement should be drawn up. But, whenever Chieppio put the documents in front of him during the next few weeks and months, the Duke pushed them aside, saying that he had more urgent business in hand. So that summer came before his signature was at last obtained. Under this agreement Pieter was engaged by the Duke for an indefinite period at a salary of four hundred ducats a year, to be paid in quarterly installments in advance.

That summer the Court went into mourning. The Duke's mother, the Austrian Archduchess Eleanor, who had lived in her suite in semiretirement, died suddenly. When she died, the Duke was in the midst of one of his wild orgies. He saw his bereavement as a divine punishment and tried to ease his conscience by giving his mother a most elaborate and magnificent funeral. Pieter worked feverishly on the plans for the funeral decorations, a small army of joiners, upholsterers, and painters following his directions. The Duke decreed that his mother should be laid to rest in one of the chapels of the Jesuit church of the Holy Trinity. He promised Father Caprara, the General of the Order, that the chapel should be rebuilt and its walls adorned with pictures, thus at once beautifying the church and providing a suitable resting place for the Archduchess. After some delay he kept his word. One day in late autumn he sent for Pieter and ordered him to paint three altarpieces for the new chapel. The pictures were, of course, to be of a religious nature, but, as was usual, the members of the bereaved family were to be included. Pieter should discuss the pictures with the General and then report to him.

Pieter was overjoyed at the opportunity to do some original work. He

went at once to see Father Caprara and discuss possible subjects. It was at length decided that the centerpiece should represent the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and so do honor to the church; the other two were to depict the Baptism and the Resurrection. The members of the House of Gonzaga would appear in the centerpiece. The scheme was submitted to the Duke, and he expressed his satisfaction.

First, Pieter made a sketch. This showed the Gonzaga family kneeling in prayer on a balcony supported by columns; they gazed heavenward while two winged angels unveiled a picture. The picture portrayed the Holy Trinity: on the right the Father, on the left the Son, and in the center the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove. Vincenzo and the Duchess appeared in the foreground, the Duke's deceased parents immediately behind them, and at each side their children. There were nine figures in all. On the Duke's instructions, Pieter completed the picture in every detail, undertaking the portraits of the family. But, when he informed the Duke through Chieppio that he was ready for sittings, he was told that the family had no time at present; meanwhile he was to start work on the sidepieces. First he painted John the Baptist baptizing the Savior in the waters of the Jordan. He was completely satisfied with the painting, and the Jesuits said it reminded them of Raphael or Michelangelo. Then he tackled the Resurrection: a well-grouped crowd in the foreground, the newly arisen Christ above them. Pieter knew he had painted a masterpiece.

The Duke had no longer any excuse to postpone examining the pictures. He praised them in the liveliest terms, and was especially pleased by some of the detail.

"And where do you intend to place us? Oh, I see, exactly as we arranged. But why have you left room for five children? I have only four."

"For the sake of symmetry, Your Highness. I want to paint a courtier with a dog beside Prince Ferdinando."

"A dog?"

"Yes, sir. Her Highness, your mother, was very fond of her dog Gioco. It will certainly please her in Heaven if the dog is included in the picture."

"Splendid. But tell me, Chieppio, how are we to arrange the sittings?"

"Please leave that to me. Be assured I shall leave Your Highness to

the last. The *fiammingo* will begin with the portraits of the late Duke and Duchess."

The Duke approved of this and, as the hunt was waiting for him, left hurriedly. Pieter set about collecting every picture he could find of the late Duke and Duchess. He found a particularly clear portrait of Guglielmi, and he remembered the features of the Duchess quite well. Both portraits were soon finished. Now he was ready for the Duke's family. First came Eleonora Medici. She was courteous to Pieter, but she said little. Then came the children. The Crown Prince Francesco was nineteen and already had a mustache; according to the Court, there was no better-looking crown prince in all Europe. Prince Ferdinando was eighteen, and Prince Vincenzo was a growing boy. Their passion for the theater was as great as their father's. Princess Margherita, who had been ten when Pieter first came to Court, was now fifteen. She dressed like a lady of fashion, but she giggled and blushed whenever Pieter spoke to her.

The portraits were a great success; and now only Duke Vincenzo and the as yet unnamed courtier remained. His Highness was as reluctant as ever to sit, and it was only after Chieppio had induced a deputation of monks to visit the palace to remind him of the sacredness of his mother's memory and the interests of the Church, that he appeared in the studio. He lost no time in telling Pieter that he could expect this one sitting only. He could not remain still, constantly changed his position, got up, sat down, asked for a glass of water. After a short time he went over to look at the picture.

"What about this black head?" he asked.

"It's for one of Your Highness's humble servants."

"Just take a look around the Court. You'll find enough empty heads there."

"I have a possible candidate. But I don't know whether he would meet with Your Highness's approval."

"Well, out with it. Who have you in mind?"

"Your Highness's most humble and faithful servant: myself."

The Duke smiled.

"All right. Paint yourself. But you've never appeared in such company before. No, not even when you were at the Spanish Court. Three princes, one princess, two dukes, two duchesses, the Holy Trinity, and you. . . .

But I mustn't blaspheme; now I shall have to visit the priest again. Oh, I'm always in trouble, and now I have a headache. Haven't I given you time enough? I'll give you a special present if you'll let me go now."

Of course Pieter had to let him go, and the Duke forgot about the special present; indeed Pieter would have been surprised if he had remembered. Fortunately he had a clear picture of the Duke in his mind. He knew his own face well, too, and he painted it in with great pleasure about the courtier's collar.

Father Caprara was astonished when he saw Pieter in the painting.

"Won't there be trouble on account of this?" he asked.

"The Duke suggested that I should include myself."

"Then I have no objection."

The rebuilding of the chapel had long been completed, and now only the three pictures were wanting. Pieter himself carefully nailed them into position. The General suggested that they should be consecrated in the near future. The Duke had no alternative but to sit through a long morning Mass. As soon as it was over, he called Pieter to him.

"I have more work for you, *fiammingo*. Come up to my suite; I want a quiet talk with you."

Pieter was at once admitted when he arrived at the Duke's apartments.

"Listen," he said earnestly. "Last night I got drunk. One of the women called me Hercules when I happened to upset a table. I replied that if I was Hercules she was a nymph, the others were all fauns and nymphs, too, and we were all on Mount Olympus. Then another woman who had been tickling my neck all evening said what a pretty picture the scene would make. So paint me a drunken Hercules surrounded by nymphs and fauns. And don't talk about it. Well, what's the matter now?"

"Your Highness deprives me of a great honor. If you hadn't found it necessary to remind me to keep silent, your confidence would have been still more gratifying."

"Oh, I know you're a reliable fellow. Do you need anything?"

"I shall need models, Your Highness."

"Talk to Chieppio about it. Now, see you make a good job. I kept thinking about the picture all through Mass. . . . There, my tongue has slipped again. Really, I must reform. I'm a terrible hopeless fellow. Forget what I've said. You may go now."

Pieter at once went to find Chieppio. He told that gentleman that he

wished to paint a picture of Hercules surrounded by nymphs and fauns for the Duke.

The Chamberlain was astonished.

"So he said nothing about the copies for the Emperor Rudolf?"

"Not a word."

"His Highness has many worries; he must have forgotten to mention it. Listen, I think I told you that while you were in Spain a painter from Prague turned up here. You remember?"

"Of course. Johann Achen, the Emperor's court painter. Yes, I've heard of him. He comes from Cologne."

"That is so. Well, this man Achen praised your copying tremendously when he was here. And apparently he wasn't being merely polite, for he also spoke of you to his master. Rudolf has now written to the Duke requesting that you should be allowed to copy for him all the Correggios at our court. He's a great admirer of Correggio's work. Why do you look so depressed?"

"Because I was so delighted about the Hercules picture, and I loathe copying."

"I understand. Fortunately for you, we have only three Correggios: the *Ecce Homo*, the *Venus with Mercury and Cupid*, and the *St. Jerome*. You must copy them quickly. And then you can go on with your picture. Wait here for a few minutes. I will find out whether the Duke approves of these arrangements."

Pieter waited. He did not feel enthusiastic about the copying work, but it was some consolation to know that the Holy Roman Emperor was aware of his talent and had himself given him the task. And then, of course, the copying would not take long. Chieppio returned almost immediately and confirmed that the work for the Emperor had in fact to be done first. The Duke had unfortunately forgotten about it. Pieter resigned himself to the inevitable.

He soon finished the three copies. Meanwhile he continued his search for models. There was no difficulty in finding a Hercules, for he had once seen a half-naked groom working in the stables, whose splendid physique had caught his attention. He would make an admirable drunken, pleasure-loving Hercules. To find the two female nudes he required was more difficult, but he was at last successful. One of them was the wife of a palace doorkeeper. Her figure was good and her face ex-

cellent for the purpose. The doorkeeper, when offered a sum of money, readily agreed to let Pieter make use of his wife and seemed a little disappointed when he learned that her only duties would be to sit for a portrait. As the other nymph, he chose one of the actresses, a dancer on whom he could rely to hold the somewhat difficult pose he required.

He placed his group at the edge of a wood; the background would be partly a green plain, partly sky. One of the women he painted as a nymph, the other as a faun. The drunken Hercules, unable to stand, was supported on the knee of the faun, who was assisted by the nymph. Pieter prepared the colored sketch with special care.

The Duke was entranced by the finished painting. His first question was about the original of the nymph.

"Gianna, the little dancer, was my model."

"Oh. I had never noticed what a lovely figure she had. Most interesting."

He stared at the nymph with great concentration, but had no other comment to make on the picture. Later old Chieppio congratulated Pieter. He thought the picture a very fine piece of work, though a trifle too dark in tone in some parts.

"By the way, have you heard the news? Pourbus may visit us."

"Pourbus? Why? I thought his plans had succeeded and he had become the court painter of Henry IV."

"Oh yes, but he's always willing to undertake portrait commissions outside France. He spends very little time at the Paris court. If this arrangement suits Henry IV, we cannot quarrel with it. You see, our master is beginning to plan the future of his children. As a wife for the Crown Prince he has selected Marguerite, Princess of Savoy—a most suitable choice both financially and politically. Prince Ferdinando is soon to take holy orders, and we want to obtain for him a cardinal's hat. And who do you think may marry the little Duchess? The Emperor Rudolf himself! When we broached the matter, he didn't refuse to discuss it; on the contrary, he asked us to provide him, within an inch, with all the measurements of our little Duchess—her height, her bust, her hips; then he wrote to Pourbus, commissioning him to paint her portrait. All this I tell you because I know we can trust your discretion and it's well for you to realize the importance of Pourbus's work. I shall put him under your care; both of you are Flemish and painters; you must gently persuade him to make the portrait as flattering as possible."

"But why do we need Pourbus? I painted the Duchess myself when I did the picture of the Holy Trinity. I still have my sketches. It would be an easy matter for me to work up a portrait."

"My friend, I told you that the Emperor has already commissioned Pourbus!"

"Was His Imperial Majesty dissatisfied, then, with the copies I made? As far as I remember, he wrote to you quite enthusiastically."

"Yes, he was enchanted by them. But he thought of Pourbus first."

Pieter remained silent. Chieppio's slight confusion made him suspect that Pourbus had received his commission not from Prague but from Mantua, and that the ducal secretary was anxious to spare his feelings. He never mentioned the matter again. But he was hurt. At last he decided that he had not yet achieved complete detachment and wisdom. Horace had been wiser. "*Aequam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem.*" "Guard the calm of your soul even if your affairs go astray." And as he repeated the Latin verses, he suddenly felt an overwhelming desire for Rome.

Now he had an added reason to long for the Eternal City. Philips, his brother, had returned to Louvain with the Richardot boy. Lipsius, the world-famous professor of law, had selected him as his successor. But in the meantime he had been offered quicker and more interesting advancement. He was told in Louvain that Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, one of the richest prelates in Rome, was looking for a suitable keeper for his immense library. Lipsius had met the Cardinal during his years in Rome and knew his best friend, Cardinal Olivier. He wrote a very warm commendatory letter to both of them on Philips's behalf. Philips was engaged for the important post. Now he wrote from Rome a letter full of pride and happiness, begging his brother to take a short holiday and spend it with him.

Pieter went to Chieppio and told him that he wanted to go to Rome. He was so persistent that at last Chieppio persuaded the Duke to let him go. And Pieter set out, his heart full of happiness.

Philips had taken lodgings where there was room for them both. And on his arrival Pieter found that a studio had already been fitted out for him. The house was situated in the Via della Croce, close to the Piazza di Spagna. The life delighted him. Every evening the brothers appeared in society. They renewed their friendship with Elsheimer, they

met again Cardinal Montalto, they were frequent guests in the palaces of the Cardinals Colonna, Borghese, Olivier, and Cesi. They frequented the house of the elder Richardot son. They made friends with Giovanni Magno, the Duke's representative in Rome. They moved among writers, scientists, artists, prelates. And always they went about together. Regular passers-by on the Piazza di Spagna soon became used to the two *flamingo* brothers who dressed alike, trimmed their beards alike, and seemed inseparable. The resemblance was not a superficial one. In spite of the long years of separation, they both still loved the same things, shared the same ideas; and the classical world was still their greatest delight. Now they could follow their inclinations to their hearts' content, among the ruins of which the city was full. Philips was full of a plan to write a book on ancient Roman fashions in dress. His desk was already littered with piles of notes. And, when he encountered difficulties, as often as not Pieter's capacious memory came to the rescue.

Their friendship with persons of consequence enabled Pieter to see many collections of paintings he would otherwise have missed. He had free access to the Farnese, the Vittorio, and Orsini palaces. He was never tired of examining these treasures, and he took every opportunity to add to his own collection, as far as his modest means allowed. His collection had grown considerably, the finest pieces being a few rare old coins, a strangely beautiful cameo, and small statues of Cicero and Seneca. Yet, as his salary of a hundred ducats a quarter was by no means adequate, and in any case arrived at infrequent intervals, Pieter had to live modestly and spend very little on luxuries. He had to forgo much, including his morning rides; and, used as he had been to strenuous exercise, he soon began to feel unwell. Long daily walks failed to make up the deficiency. And then one morning he woke with a fever and could not leave his bed. He asked Philips to call on Elsheimer and find out the name of his doctor, for it was said that German doctors were the best in the city. The same day a loud-voiced, heavily bearded German called Johann Faber visited him. After examining him he declared that Pieter was suffering from pleurisy and would have to stay in bed for some time.

"Pleurisy? In August?"

"Unfortunately, yes. Perhaps an old cold has been hiding inside you. I must warn you that you can't take this illness lightly. But don't worry. I shall have you about in a few weeks."

The Doctor came every day, and every day he would shout from the doorway in a strong Bavarian accent: "How are we, pearl of painters?" He was a somewhat rough fellow, but beneath his boisterous manner was the sentimental soul of a child. The medicine which he prescribed for Pieter, a particularly evil-tasting concoction, he bought himself, for he guessed that the brothers had not much money. He would sit on the edge of the patient's bed and tell stories of Bamberg, his birthplace. It was, apparently, a wonderful city.

Racked by ceaseless coughing, Pieter spent many a sleepless night. Whether he had to attribute his recovery to the medicine, he could not tell; but recover he did after five weeks in bed. The day came when Faber, after slapping Pieter so hard on the back that he nearly choked, said:

"Well, pearl of painters, you are cured. I shall not call again, unless I happen to be in the neighborhood."

"Thank you. Now you must tell me how much I owe you, Master Aesculapius."

"A hundred thousand pieces of gold, to be paid in one hundred years."

"But seriously. How much am I in your debt?"

"Seriously, I shall tell you. I am in your debt. We talked German. Sometimes we understood each other only with the greatest difficulty. But still we talked German."

Pieter had to learn to walk again. He would stagger for a few steps, hanging on to the furniture for support, and then have to rest. Once out of bed, however, he got well quickly. Then one day when Dr. Faber came to see him, Pieter pulled a chair to the window and said:

"Sit down, Aesculapius. I shall begin your portrait at once."

The Doctor said Pieter would do nothing of the kind. There were too many urgent cases waiting for him. But at last he was persuaded and sat for half an hour. He came every day. In a week the portrait was ready. The good Doctor's eyes were moist when Pieter gave it to him.

Faber became a firm friend, and together with Elsheimer he often visited the brothers. The old life began again; money worries, archaeological delights, adventures in society. One evening at the house of Cardinal Montalto the talk turned on Pieter's illness and recovery. Suddenly the Cardinal exclaimed:

"Listen. Do you know anything about the Order of the Oratorians?"

"Yes. Isn't it a nursing order for which no vows are necessary? They recently built the church of Santa Maria in Vallicella. I have seen it. It's very beautiful, but rather bare."

"Exactly. The Order has decided to put an end to the bareness. I met the General of the Oratorians today, and he told me they have plenty of money and are now making agreements with various artists. There are some famous names involved: Reni, Caravaggio, Cortone, Berroccio. I am ashamed that I didn't think of you. But I'll try to make them give you something."

"What shall I do, Your Eminence?"

"Wait at home quietly. If I'm successful, you will have news in a couple of days."

But Pieter did not obey. Next day and the following day he went to the Church in Vallicella. Although it had been consecrated seven years before, it was still unfinished. Pieter walked about the church like a spy, wondering which of the altars he would be asked to decorate. Whenever he saw an Oratorian friar he greeted him with great reverence. On the third day, however, Montalto sent for him to explain that the matter was proving more difficult than he had expected.

It was not until two months later that Pieter was sent for by the General of the Oratorians. That person was exceedingly rude and abrupt in manner but had honest eyes.

"You have been recommended to me, *signor*. But you have been recommended by persons of such consequence that I must doubt your talents. Reni, Caravaggio, Cortone, and Berroccio are working for us, but they were recommended by their works, not by cardinals."

"My pictures will show that the cardinals' faith in me is justified."

"Perhaps. But it is not sufficient that you should have faith in yourself. I, too, must have faith in you."

"Is it your custom to pay in advance for work, Your Reverence?"

"It is. But not to such overinsistent fellows."

"I am not asking for money, Reverend Father, but for trust. And even this for only three days. Tell me the subject. In three days I shall bring you sketches. If you like them, well and good. If not, we shall consider the matter closed."

"We might discuss that. Do you know the church? You do. And you know the high altar? It already has an altarpiece, a very old painting to

which are attributed miraculous powers. It is uncovered only on great feast days. Below it there is a niche, an admirable place for a picture. This is the one you would have to paint. All the other work has already been commissioned. In our church we guard the relics of St. Papias, St. Maurice, and others—you will receive a complete list. Your task will be to paint St. Gregory surrounded by other saints. In three days you will bring me the sketch, and if I like it you will get the commission. The remuneration will be three thousand two hundred ducats, payable when the committee has approved the finished picture. And if the picture is not a success—even if I should have approved the sketch—you may go and complain to your cardinals. Here is a list of the saints, and now I must return to my work.”

In three days Pieter finished a color sketch. The General seemed to be delighted with it. But the approval of the committee had also to be obtained and that was a week in forthcoming. The General was now much more kindly disposed. Pieter hurried to Philips to break the happy news. The brothers embraced in their joy and then went to tell Signor Magno of the great news. The Resident, however, handed Pieter a letter from Chieppio to say that the Duke commanded his immediate return to Mantua. Pieter’s holiday had been long enough, and, besides, His Highness had several tasks for him. Pieter felt as if his house were falling about his ears. Then began a sad discussion between himself, Philips, and Signor Magno. Pieter fully expected the Resident to see things from the Duke’s standpoint. But, surprisingly, he urged him to rebel.

“I advise you not to leave. Write to Chieppio, not to the Duke. Tell him everything.”

Pieter at once sat down to write a letter, repeating the sentences aloud as he wrote. After a few moments, Magno stopped him and began to dictate:

“. . . that if the tasks the Duke has for me cannot be postponed then I will at once return to Mantua, for his wishes are the most important in the world for me. But in that case I beg that His Highness shall give his ducal word that I may return for three months next spring to execute the commission entrusted to me by the afore-mentioned gentleman.”

“I adore the Duke,” Magno smiled. “But I have discovered that this is the only way to handle him. Finish the letter and send it off on my responsibility. Until the reply arrives, you can continue your work.”

Pieter felt reassured. He finished the letter and left it to be delivered by the Resident's courier. That same day he began work, but not on the painting itself. He visited libraries and churches, searching for information on the company of saints he was to paint. Cardinal Colonna's library was a rich hunting ground. Philips helped him to make notes from the many hagiological works. Together they worked through the *Acta Sanctorum*. They steeped themselves in the stories of the saints. After a few days they had so much material that even Tintoretto could not have crowded all of it into a single canvas. But they delighted in the research for its own sake, taking intense pleasure in the unearthing of obscure details and little-known facts. Yet, in spite of their happiness, there was always the gnawing fear that the capricious Duke would insist on Pieter's return.

His Highness was, however, exceedingly gracious. As a Christmas present he sent Pieter permission to stay on in Rome until Easter. Free from anxiety, Pieter could now start work on the picture in earnest. He worked all day and every day, but he worked slowly and with great care, acutely aware of the fact that his picture would be seen beside those of the greatest painters of Rome. The commission was a personal triumph, and he was happy. He communicated his happiness in a long letter to his mother.

Her answer, however, was depressing. It was addressed to her two sons. She could not, she said, conceal from them any longer that she was very ill. For some time she had suffered from asthma, but she had not taken the illness very seriously. Now one heavy attack followed another and she was forced to bear them all alone. She was poor and without comfort, and the fact that she acted as guardian to Blandine's two orphans added to her troubles. She was crushed in mind and body and begged that one of them should come to see her at once. She left them to decide which of them should make the journey, but reading between the lines Pieter fancied she would prefer Philips to go. She wrote that Philips could not remain a librarian all his life; his abilities fitted him for something better. His friends in Antwerp were doing their best to secure him the post of town clerk, which was now vacant. And they were likely to be successful. It was important, however, that his papers should be put in order; for Philips had been born on German soil and was therefore technically a German citizen. According to law, the town clerk of

Antwerp had to be Flemish, and he would have to undergo "Brabantization," as it was called, before he could apply for the post. And that could only be done at home.

Philips could not let the opportunity slip, and he was also anxious to return for his mother's sake. The brothers said good-by, painfully aware that it might be years before they would meet again. Pieter stayed behind alone. Easter was drawing near; he had few idle moments. But there was still no news from Mantua, and the picture required only another two weeks' work. And then suddenly came the order: "Come immediately." But this time the message gave cause for joy. Chieppio wrote that the Duke was about to take a cure at Spaa, and Spaa was in Pieter's own country. His Highness was naturally anxious to take his painter with him. And so there seemed to be a possibility that Pieter would be able to see his sick mother after all. He at once went to Serra, the high dignitary at the Vatican whose word would be final in the selection of the pictures for the Church in Vallicella. But His Eminence was away. Pieter explained the position to his secretary and said he would return in a little while to finish the picture. The secretary raised no objection, and Pieter hurried back to Mantua as fast as he could.

He arrived in Mantua late at night and at once sought out Chieppio. The ducal secretary was spending the evening with his two sons and had not yet retired. Scarcely pausing to greet him, Pieter asked excitedly: "When do we leave for Flanders?"

Chieppio shook his head.

"The Duke has changed his mind. He is not spending the summer at Spaa but at Sampierdarena, near Genoa. You are to go there with him."

Pieter felt as if he had been knocked on the head. He asked permission to sit down and stared before him in stunned silence.

XIV

For weeks afterward the palace was like a torture chamber to Pieter. The days passed, and the Duke found new excuses for delaying his departure. Meantime, the Duchess Margherita had been married to the Count of Lorraine, not to the Emperor Rudolf. Ferdinando, the Duke's middle son, had received his cardinal's hat, and preparations were being made for his departure for Rome. The delays seemed endless, and Pieter thought sorrowfully of his mother and the unfinished picture. By the time the Duke and his suite left for Sampierdarena late in July, Pieter had lost all interest in the excursion.

The Duke was friendly with a Genoese family called Spinola which had once produced a famous general. Young Spinola, like most merchant princes, was proud of being on intimate terms with the aristocracy, and, with his friend Grimaldi, he had arranged that jointly they should entertain the Duke and his suite at Grimaldi's palace at Sampierdarena. It was because of this invitation that the Duke had not gone to Spaa. Genoese society was notorious for its gambling, and His Highness loved cards even more than women. He arrived at Sampierdarena attended by several Mantuan noblemen and courtiers, his court doctor and court painter, scores of servants, and the court orchestra under Monteverdi, its newly appointed conductor. Nor had he forgotten his favorite monkey and dogs. As Grimaldi's palace turned out to be too small for such a host, two neighboring villas had been rented.

The continual orgies in the palace made it difficult to sleep there. Concerts, stage performances, bathing excursions began at noon and lasted till evening; then there would be a banquet, after which the gentlemen would gamble till daybreak. Pieter took no part in these amusements. His time was strictly apportioned. He got up at dawn, rode into the town and had a swim; thereupon he visited various palaces in the neighborhood to continue his copying work. He had now come to despise that work, but he knew that he would have to continue it as long as he remained the Duke's painter. He could not hope as yet to make a living

by his original work. Yet, as if to demonstrate the cowardice of the policy, he actually succeeded in obtaining independent commissions. To execute these he rented a studio in the town and, after copying all day, worked there till sunset. He would then ride back to Sampierdarena and go to bed just as the festivities in the illuminated garden were about to begin. He was up by four, and he often talked over a commission with one or other of the gentlemen then. Early one morning the Marchese Nicola Pallavicini asked him whether he would care to paint an altarpiece, as he owed one to the Cathedral of St. Ambrose. The subject, he said, would be the Circumcision. As Pieter had finished a portrait of an elderly lady the previous afternoon, the commission came at an opportune moment. The altarpiece was finished in ten days, much to the satisfaction of the Marchese.

"It's like a good Correggio."

But Pieter was not flattered by the compliment, for while working on the picture he had felt memories of Correggio stirring within him. Had he copied the master's work so much that his influence had taken root? The thought depressed him. He longed to free himself from that subtle poison.

After finishing this picture, he was commissioned to paint the portraits of the two Marchesas Brigitta Spinola and Maria Grimaldi. Both these ladies possessed fine, expressive features, and this time Pieter resolved not to let his style be influenced by anyone. But at every turn he was haunted by the ghosts of masters he had once worshiped but was now beginning to hate.

The summer holiday at Genoa lasted two months. Toward the end of the second month Pieter managed to obtain an audience with the Duke for the first time since their arrival. His Highness was now prepared to examine the copies he had made, and the display of feminine loveliness so charmed him that he was overflowing with good will. Pieter seized the opportunity and asked permission to return to Rome. The Duke readily assented, and Pieter carefully avoided him lest he should change his mind.

Pieter left almost stealthily for Rome. He sighed with relief when one late September day he again entered his studio on the Via della Croce. His first act was to enquire about the church paintings. Serra had not yet returned to Rome, but that was unimportant as many of the painters

had not yet finished their pictures. This gave Pieter plenty of time to finish his own work and even take on a new commission. The Church was thinking of canonizing Ignatius Loyola, and one of the smaller publishers in Antwerp had conceived the idea of bringing out his biography, consisting chiefly of pictures with an explanatory text. Philips, now settled in Antwerp, saw in this venture an opportunity for Pieter. Some fifty drawings had already been collected for the volume. Pieter's task would be to obtain biographical data in Rome, make the remaining drawings, and improve those which needed improvement. He would return the completed manuscript to Antwerp, and the honorarium would go to his mother. He began work at once.

Pieter obtained other work, too, while finishing his picture of St. Gregory. A letter arrived from the Duchess of Mantua to say that as the Court Chapel was being rebuilt a new altarpiece would be necessary. She had been told that a Roman artist called Pomerancio would be a most suitable man for the work. So would Pietro Paolo seek him out and commission a picture of St. Eleanor, to be executed according to the measurements given? He was to be sure to make a good bargain.

Pieter swallowed his chagrin and went at once to Pomerancio's studio. Pomerancio, whose real name was Roncalli, was a fashionable artist, and by no means a bad one. Pieter found him to be a middle-aged man with a somewhat supercilious air. Pieter introduced himself and explained the reason for his visit.

"I'll be delighted," replied Pomerancio, "but not till next year. I have so many commissions that I hardly know which to start first."

"Do not refuse, *signor*. My mistress waits the painting urgently."

"If the matter is so urgent, why doesn't she give you the work? You say you are yourself a painter."

"Do not be surprised if your fame makes you more attractive than my humble self to the Mantuan court."

"Well, I'll see. Come back in a few days and I'll let you know if I can manage it sooner."

"Thank you, *signor*. And what may I say to Mantua concerning your fee?"

"Five hundred gold pieces," replied Pomerancio imperturbably. "That is what everyone pays me."

Pieter took his leave politely and went straight to the Resident. Magno

thought the price excessive. They at once wrote to the Duchess, who replied by express courier. She, too, found the sum high, but she simply must have the picture. Pieter and Magno agreed to go as high as four hundred gold pieces. A few days later Pieter again visited Pomerancio and found him willing to give the work precedence, but he would not accept a scudo less than five hundred gold pieces. Pieter marshaled all his powers of persuasion.

And at last Pomerancio yielded.

A week later Pieter again called at the studio; and, as the Duchess had written a second importunate letter, he was able to report that the picture was already well under way. In three weeks it was finished. The money to pay for it, however, did not arrive, and Pieter felt deeply embarrassed. Three times he wrote to Mantua urging that the fee should be sent at once. But with no result. At last he had no alternative but to refer Pomerancio to the Resident. But that was not his only cause for worry. His mother's health was steadily declining.

Philips was unable to report favorably on his mother's condition. But his last letter had contained one piece of good news: he had become engaged to the girl of whom he had talked so much in Rome. Jan Brant, a prominent member of the city council, had married a De Moy girl, and Mrs. Brant had a much younger sister called Maria. Philips had been in love with her for years, and it had been plain from the first that she returned his feelings. And, now that he had settled down to a good job, he intended to marry her.

As Pieter read Philips's letter he realized that the strange, indefinable nostalgia which had afflicted him for so long had been homesickness. He longed for Antwerp. And the more clearly he recognized his malady, the stronger it grew. When he thought of his ailing mother, he was conscious only of an intense desire to leave everything and hurry to her—no matter what the cost.

But his reason was stronger than his emotions. He had convinced himself that he could not give up work on the altarpiece; after all, it meant not only money but fame. It was, in any case, too early to leave the service of the Duke; through the Mantuan Court he could hope to form useful connections with the various courts of Europe. He stayed on, but his deep longing for his mother and Antwerp could not be assuaged.

He finished the picture toward the end of the winter. He thought it

excellent; the best, in fact, that he had ever done. He showed it first to Elsheimer, who had seen it several times in the process of creation and had praised it enthusiastically. Then he invited his patrons to view it. Three of the cardinals came and overwhelmed him with flattering praises. Now he felt sufficiently assured to invite some of the more important members of the Oratorian Order to view it. These, too, had nothing but praise for it. The General suggested that he should bring along certain well-known artists and ask their expert opinion. Pieter gladly agreed. Next day, in the company of the General, Guido Reni himself came to the studio; it was the first time that Pieter and he had met. Reni was a sturdy, corpulent man, a little older than Pieter. He was polite and friendly, but it was difficult to understand what he said, as he had never lost the broad dialect of the small village near Bologna which had been his birthplace. He started by praising the Flemings in general.

"Which part of Flanders do you come from?" he asked Pieter.

"Antwerp, *signor*."

"Bravo, I'm glad to hear that. My first master, Calwaerts, also came from Antwerp. He was an excellent man, and I owe a great deal to him. We call him *Dionisio Fiammingo*."

"I, too, have been called *fiammingo* everywhere in Italy."

"Good. But now let's see this picture of which I've heard so much."

Reni spent a long time in front of the easel; he seemed to be intensely interested in the picture. At last he stepped back.

"Excellent," he said. "You're worthy of your nation's fame. It's wonderful how you paint human flesh. Few of us can equal it. Just as if you mixed real blood with your paint—it's so true to nature, so lifelike."

The glance which he gave Pieter was compounded of curiosity and respect.

"I'm sure you'll make a great deal of money," he added.

"And he certainly won't lose it on cards," the General interrupted, turning to Pieter. "You must know, *fiammingo*, that this man who enjoys the Pope's personal favor and earns as much as he cares to, throws away all his money on the gambling tables."

Reni laughed.

"It is possible to win at cards, too. Till now I've mostly lost, but sooner or later my luck will change. You don't play, friend *fiammingo*?"

"No. I can't tell one card from another."

"But at least you don't mind taking a glass of wine now and then?"

"I don't drink, *signor*. I dislike wine."

"What a strange painter you are! I think you won't merely make a lot of money, you'll keep it as well."

They talked a long time; and, when the others had left, Pieter felt elated. He stared at his picture and tried to put himself in the place of someone who had never seen it before. He decided to take the picture to the church and nail it into position. He notified the committee of his intention, and asked two members to visit the church and decide if they approved of the painting in its final setting. His heart beat loudly as, with the help of the old sacristan, he secured his own work beside the miraculous picture of the Holy Virgin.

"I cannot see anything," said one of the Oratorians.

"Nor can I," said the other.

Pieter walked over and stood beside them. It was true. The picture gleamed like the surface of a sunlit lake. The awful discovery made him slightly dizzy. He went to the other side of the altar, but from there, too, the picture could not be seen.

"It's a great pity," said one of the priests.

"The General ought to see it, and Serra, too. I can't make out, *fiammingo*, what the trouble is."

"The light is bad," replied Pieter, "and the turpentine is too shiny."

Everybody commiserated with him, but some of the friendly but inexperienced advice given him was so stupid that he did not answer for fear of being rude. He replaced the sheet over the painting, left the church, and at once went to see the General. His Reverence raised his eyebrows and gave no definite answer. He was busy and would inspect the picture in Serra's company. Pieter, he said, would soon hear from him. Pieter went home and waited two days in an agony of doubt and apprehension. Then the General notified him that he and Serra were ready to inspect the painting. Pieter removed the sheet and stood beside them at the altar. They looked at each other and shook their heads.

"I'm sorry, your work has been done in vain, *fiammingo*. You can see for yourself that. . . ."

"There is no need to continue, Your Reverence. I agree."

He took down the picture and bowed silently. They shook their heads regretfully but made no effort to detain him. Back in the studio, Pieter

replaced the painting on the easel. The light was good, and the picture seemed as good as ever. He could have cried with anger. His vanity was wounded; he would suffer financially, too. His salary from Mantua was long overdue; his debts in Rome were growing.

On the following day the head of the Order came to see him.

"I have come with the knowledge of Monsignor Serra," he said. "None of us wish to lose this beautiful picture. But you will understand that we cannot accept it as it is. I have therefore come to ask you to paint it again."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I have heard from painters—I myself understand nothing of these technicalities—that canvas sometimes takes color badly. Would it not be possible to use some other material which subdues the gleam of the colors?"

"I am very grateful for your suggestion. It may be possible to work on stone or wood."

"No, my friend, you cannot afford to think this matter over. You can only say 'yes,' and say it now."

Pieter looked at his visitor, astonished.

"Father, your straightforwardness does not surprise me. But why should I be obliged to answer without reflection?"

"Because every contract cuts both ways. When our agreement was made you assumed an obligation. So please do not waste any time. Until the new picture is ready, this one will remain as a token of your good faith."

He went to the door and called out: "Take it away." Two servants entered, bowed politely, and carried the picture off. Pieter stared after them in amazement. He did not speak until they had gone.

"You have not acted very wisely, Your Reverence."

"What do you mean?" the priest growled.

"You ordered me to copy the picture; but you have taken away the original."

"Of course I have. You can copy it in the church. Don't make such a fuss, but get to work. The sooner the picture is finished, the sooner will you get your money."

"Are you prepared to pay in advance?"

"Of course not. What if you do have some trouble with the copy? It is our duty to guard the money entrusted to us."

"And if the copy is successful, what about the original?"

"Naturally you can do with it whatever you like."

The General took his leave, and Pieter pondered long over the new situation. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to Chieppio, asking him to intercede on his behalf, that the Duke might buy the original. He would let him have it for a hundred gold pieces instead of eight hundred. Then he began to consider on what material the new picture should be painted. He decided at last to choose slate. The next day, from dawn to dusk, he searched the city in vain for a sheet of slate large enough for the picture. He explained his difficulty to Serra.

"I am at my wits' end, Monsignor. There isn't a sheet of slate large enough in the whole of Rome."

"That doesn't interest me. But I want the picture. Have you any suggestion?"

"Yes, but I shall require special permission to carry it out. I could paint the copy on three separate sheets of slate. I therefore ask your permission that the space at my disposal shall be used for three pictures instead of one."

"For the same money?"

"Naturally. But I would like to work at home; so please let me have the original back."

"All right. But now get to work. All the other pictures together haven't given us so much trouble as yours."

Serra's manner revealed that he would have preferred to drop the matter altogether. And yet he must have some good reason to insist on the delivery of the picture. Pieter discovered his reason when he went to the Chiesa Nuova, as the people now called the Church in Vallicella, to fetch the original. His picture was hanging in a different place; at the good light it was quite unmarred by any unpleasant glitter. Before it stood a large group of people. The picture was causing a sensation.

Next day Pieter began work with very little enthusiasm. He knew that the greatest masterpiece in the world would not show to advantage in that ill-lit niche above the altar.

Meanwhile trouble followed trouble. Philips wrote him a long letter to say that he had petitioned Archduke Albrecht, Governor of Flanders, to apply to Duke Vincenzo for him to be allowed to visit his sick mother in Antwerp. The petition had succeeded only too well. The Archduke had not merely requested but demanded that Pieter, as a Spanish subject, should be released at once. The Duke, however, had replied that he and

his court painter were bound by a contract and he could not accede to the Archduke's demand.

Pieter read all this in astonishment. He had not had the slightest idea that the Governor of Flanders and the Duke of Mantua were corresponding about his affairs.

He was still shaking his head with annoyance when an unexpected guest arrived—Pomerancio. He did not greet Pieter, but immediately began to bawl:

"I've just come from Signor Magno. And this is the ninth time I've asked him for my money. So I've come to you to give you a piece of my mind. I've been shamefully treated, and in my opinion you're responsible. I made the bargain with you—not with the Duke or Duchess of Mantua."

"But what can I do?" Pieter burst out. "I've begged and begged for the money."

"That doesn't concern me. You asked me a favor as a fellow artist. It's a disgusting business. Good day."

Pomerancio slammed the door with such violence that the house shook. It was some time before Pieter recovered from the visit. Then he collected his wits and hurried to Magno.

"I know why you've come," said the Resident despondently. "Pomerancio paid me a visit just before he called on you. But I've written nine times to Mantua about the matter, and now I have something else to tell you. Chieppio has written to say that the Duke won't buy the picture—no matter how cheaply you offer it. His Highness can't incur any additional expense. Duke Francesco is about to marry Margherita of Savoy, and the cost of the wedding will be tremendous. This is what Chieppio says:

"We are in the midst of carnival, and His Highness's forthcoming visit to Turin is causing a great commotion. He will take along with him thirty knights; his retinue will be the largest and most splendid we have ever seen.

Well, we must admit that the Duke needs all his money. But perhaps you can sell the picture here in Rome."

"I'll try. But I must say that Chieppio's answer depresses me greatly. I get my salary from Mantua so irregularly that my financial position is desperate. Can't you let me have some money?"

"I can let you have a little—about twenty *scudi*. It was destined for another purpose, but I'll give it to you on my own responsibility."

"Thank you. And now I'd like to ask you something. Do you know anything of a correspondence about me between the Governor of Flanders and the Duke?"

"No. What was it about?"

Pieter told him about Philips's letter, and they discussed the matter thoroughly. Magno was of the opinion that it would be best to pretend ignorance of the correspondence. They talked about court affairs for some time, and then Magno accompanied his guest to the door. In the entrance hall Pieter noticed a number of boxes of the kind used to transport pictures.

"What are these?" he asked.

Magno hesitated, and when he spoke his voice betrayed his embarrassment.

"They are pictures which arrived today from Naples. I am sending them on to Mantua tomorrow. Pourbus is at Naples copying portraits of beautiful women for the Duke. Good-by."

The door closed. Pieter smiled bitterly. So there was money for that. Or rather, there wasn't. Pourbus, too, would have to wait for his reward for weeks of work in Naples. He resolved to write a very frank letter to his master. But as he walked home, his anger cooled and he began to compromise with himself. He would write to Chieppio instead of the Duke. And by the time he reached home he had made a further compromise. He would not write an angry letter; he would write diplomatically. He went straight to his desk.

Rome. February 23, 1608.

Your Excellency:

Although my plan has not succeeded, I am sure you have done more for me than I have any right to expect from a person of your rank. In any case, to be quite frank, the matter is not so important for me any longer. The picture has been shown in another part of the church where the light is good, and all Rome has flocked to see it. Thus, I am confident that it will not be difficult to sell it here, especially as I have permission to modify the copy as I think best. I have only one request: that you should entreat Her Highness on my behalf to settle accounts with Cristoforo Pomerancio for the picture which I ordered from him at her express command. I beg you to urge Her Highness most strongly to pay this sum; otherwise I shall be

deeply humiliated and feel unable ever again to act in such matters. Her Highness wrote me innumerable letters urging me to persuade Pomerancio to accept the commission, and now I find her indifference in sharp contrast to her former attitude. As is my custom when confronted with such delicate matters, I turn to you for help. I kiss your hands most humbly, and I assure you that I am Your Excellency's most obedient and respectful servant.

Pietro Paolo Rubens.

Pieter read through the letter carefully, reflecting that it would probably be more effective than if it had been openly rude in tone.

After so much trouble and humiliation, there came some cause for satisfaction. Philips sent him the finished manuscript of his book on the manners and customs of ancient Rome. They had agreed that Pieter should illustrate the volume, and Philips now wrote to say that the firm of Moretus in Antwerp had agreed to publish it. His old friend Balthasar sent his warmest greetings. Thank God there was no change for the worse in their mother's health.

Homesickness once more assailed him. The sight of Balthasar's name brought back his memories of childhood. He longed to petition the Duke at once to allow him to go home. But that was impossible. He was weighed down by debt. The eight hundred gold pieces for the picture would be but a drop in the ocean—if he received them. As soon as he had finished the illustrations for Philips's book he would have to obtain commissions, and quickly. He read the manuscript at a sitting. He began to read in a spirit of brotherly love, fully prepared to excuse imperfections. But it was soon evident that Philips had written a most readable little book. Next day he began on the illustrations, putting aside the picture.

Elsheimer helped him over his financial difficulties. He simply handed over to him one of his own commissions. A prelate who had ordered a painting of St. Sebastian was willing to agree to the change. Pieter painted the saint at the moment of death, as the arrow pierced his heart. Angels were hurrying to minister to the expiring saint; they had loosened him from the ropes which bound him to the tree, and one angel was freeing his ankles. Another was drawing the arrow from his breast; others were hovering above him holding a shroud. The blending of colors, high lights, and shadows was particularly happy; the glowing flesh of the saint was painted with a consummate skill which would have delighted Reni.

"Whose style am I imitating now, I wonder?" he asked himself when he put down the brush.

And he answered at once: Correggio—though the resemblance was less strongly marked than in his picture of the Circumcision. As the idea of going home to Antwerp was constantly in his mind, he asked himself which was the more important for his artistic development, to stay on in Rome and continue to study the masterpieces of the great, or to go home at once and drink strength like Antaeus from his own soil, among his own people. He thought of the careers of the great Flemish painters. Massijs, Van der Weyde, and the rest didn't go abroad—it hadn't been the fashion in those days. But soon the Flemish artists became aware of Italy and began to visit that country in increasing numbers. Gossaert had painted quite differently after his visit to Italy—and so had Hemisson. Van Orley, Raphael's pupil, had lost his individuality. Susterman's work had become indistinguishable from that of any second-rate Italian. Grim examples, indeed—yet it was impossible to deny that their experience had enriched Flemish art by emphasizing light and a classical appreciation of beauty. Old De Vos, who had died a little while before, had not lost his individuality through being Tintoretto's friend. Where, then, was the limit beyond which one should not try any longer to learn from others? There could be only one answer: real talent maintains itself; mediocrity becomes the victim of its masters. And again he was assailed by doubt, a doubt he had not confided even to Philips. How great was his own talent? Could he study the work of others without danger to himself? He could not answer. In all other matters he was guided by reason, hard logic and will power; only when confronted by this most intimate problem did he abandon himself weakly to his own instinct and confess that he loved to delight in great masterpieces.

But his time became more and more occupied. He now obtained another commission through Elsheimer, at whose studio many people had seen and admired his painting of St. Sebastian. The Abbot of a distant Franciscan monastery had seen it and at once ordered a St. Francis, stipulating that the composition should be quietly conceived and bright colors sparingly used. Pieter painted this picture almost entirely in different shades of brown.

Nor did his friend, Dr. Faber, fail to come to his help when he saw that Pieter needed commissions so badly. He introduced him to a rich

German merchant who wanted a Roman landscape. Pieter undertook the work gladly. He had once sketched the Palatine ruins by evening light. He now took his canvas, paints, and easel to the same spot and, braving the curiosity of passers-by and the jeering of street urchins, painted the scene.

He actually received a commission from Mantua, though this did not promise any considerable financial return. In a capricious moment the Duke had decided that the drunken Hercules needed a companion picture. The subject was to be "The Hero triumphs over temptation." Magno imparted the commission to him, and he received it with a sour face. But he remembered his homesickness—he had no wish to annoy the Duke. So he painted a hero in shining armor, his face resembling that of Hercules but also with a hint of the Duke's features; a laurel wreath was being set on his head by the Genius of Virtue. One foot was planted triumphantly on Drunkenness, conceived as a faun, while he turned his back on naked Sensuality. In the background was a harridan, Sin, watching the proceedings with defeated rage.

For this picture, too, he needed a model; he wanted to represent the Genius of Virtue as a beautiful female form. None of the professional models seemed to him quite good enough. He sought Elsheimer's help, and a whole host of beautiful women visited him. But still he was dissatisfied. Nor was Reni of any assistance. He was on the point of deciding on a second-class beauty when a woman of quite startling loveliness entered his studio.

"I have heard, *signor*, that you are looking for a model. I am not a professional model, but perhaps you can use me."

"What are you then, *signora*?"

"I am a married woman. My husband is an usher."

"An usher? And you dress like this?"

"So that you need not question me further, *signor*," she said in a bored voice, "I will tell you everything. Until recently I was the mistress of a very great gentleman—with the knowledge of my husband. Every night we gambled. He lost a great deal of money and sent me away. I have already sold all my jewels. Nowadays it is difficult to find a rich protector. I met Signor Guido Reni at our gambling place, and he advised me to try and earn money in this way."

"I must tell you, *signora*, that this profession is very badly paid."

She smiled sarcastically.

"I am not depending on the money. When the picture is finished, someone is bound to ask who your model was. I shall sit for you free of charge, if you like."

"I do not wish you to sit for nothing. You will receive the usual hourly wage. Please undress."

The woman undressed quickly, kicked off her shoes, pulled off her stockings. Her toenails and her nipples were painted purple. She clasped her hands behind her neck and strained her breasts upward. Pieter stared at her in astonishment; he had never seen such a beautiful body in his life.

"Thank you. You are perfect. You may dress now. We shall start work tomorrow. Can you come at any time I wish?"

"That's the trouble. I can't. I sleep all day. At night I always gamble. I go home in the morning."

"At what hour?"

"I can't say exactly. Sometimes four, sometimes five."

"That will do. I get up at four. Can you come at six every morning?"

"Certainly. If I am ready earlier, I can wait for you here."

"That's settled, then. I shall expect you tomorrow at six. What's your name?"

"Erica."

"An uncommon name. How did you get it?"

"My mother came from Denmark. I don't know who my father was. May I go now?"

"Yes. But I should like to ask you something else. Don't paint your toenails and your nipples. The color disturbs me in my work."

"That's impossible. It's the fashion in our world. My dresses are so low-cut that my breasts are completely displayed."

"Couldn't you wash off the paint when you come here, and then paint yourself again after the sitting?"

"All right. You have strange wishes. I didn't realize painters were so particular."

While they talked, Erica had dressed. Pieter stared after her in astonishment. She was dazzlingly beautiful. And how grotesque the idea that the wife of an usher should employ a painter to put her in a shop window.

There was another world, another Rome, beside the one he knew, and in that world such flowers grew, their perfume poisonous and sweet.

When he returned from Mass the following morning he found Erica waiting for him. She had undressed to a single shift on account of the heat. When Pieter entered she prepared to slip that off too.

"You can wait until I am ready," said Pieter. "Meanwhile you may look at the canvas on the easel. You will see the pose that I need. It will be tiring. Last night I arranged this table and chair for you; there is a pillow for your head. Please try them, to see if you will be comfortable."

Erica threw off the shift and assumed her pose. Her toenails and nipples were no longer painted. Pieter began work at once.

"I haven't thanked Signor Reni for you yet."

"He knows I am working here. I met him last night. He was gambling."

"Was he winning?"

"No, losing. He always loses. He has no idea how to gamble. Not that it matters. My protector was the best gambler in the world, yet he always lost."

"Have you no hope that he will take you back?"

"Impossible. He kept me as a mascot, because when I was with him he won all the time for some years. Then he discovered that it wasn't I who brought him luck."

"But perhaps love will bring him back to you."

"Rubbish. What has it to do with love? He had other mistresses besides me."

"And you didn't mind?"

"Why should I? We got on very well. If his luck hadn't turned, we should still be together."

"You have a strange life, Erica. When do you see your husband?"

"Late in the afternoon, when I get up. That's when he comes home. And when I leave he goes to bed."

"Have you any children?"

"God forbid. They would spoil my figure, and that would be the end of me. But I don't like children, anyway. They make me nervous."

Pieter found her more and more common, but her body more and more beautiful. Erica yawned loudly.

"Are you tired? Would you like to rest for a few minutes?"

"That would be lovely."

She stretched herself on the divan and stared vacantly at the ceiling. For a few minutes neither of them spoke. Then she yawned again and got up.

"Let's go on," she said, "or I'll go to sleep."

Pieter took up his brush again. But in less than an hour he saw that he would have to let Erica go. She was almost dropping off to sleep in spite of the discomfort of her position.

The second morning passed like the first. Again she was waiting for him, but this time she had discarded even the single shift. When he entered the studio, she at once took up her pose.

"Tell me, Erica, have you ever been in love?"

"Of course! What a question! Why I'm in love now."

"Really. And who is the lucky man?"

"My husband. But he doesn't know it, the wretch. He has saved up quite a lot of money that I have brought home. Now that I don't make any more, I tried to beg him to let me use our savings. But he's stubborn. 'We won't touch it,' he says, 'not until we've bought the house.' You see, we want a house in Tivoli—with a garden. And we haven't nearly enough money yet. When we can afford to buy the house, we shall turn it into an inn."

"And why do you love your husband?"

"How can I tell? Perhaps because he doesn't care for me. I'm not beautiful enough for him."

"What!"

"That's the Gospel truth. He says only fair women are beautiful—not dark ones."

That morning Pieter worked for more than an hour, and the picture got along well. During the rest of the day he kept thinking of his model. He felt a curious anger against her. He blamed her in his mind; he would have liked to beat her.

But it was someone else who beat her, it seemed. Next morning he was astonished to see her lovely arms disfigured by big bruises.

"What has happened to you? Your lips are swollen, too."

"Nothing," she said indifferently. "My husband beat me. And it wasn't the first time, either."

"And why did he beat you?"

"My God, why? We quarreled. I asked for money. He wouldn't let me have it. I started to shout, and he beat me. I don't care."

"But I care. Your lips are swollen and shapeless; the sight of these bruises puts me off. And there is something else the matter with you. You've been drinking. Put on your dress and go home. I can't work with you in this condition."

Erica burst into tears. She put on her clothes, sobbing. When the door closed behind her, Pieter could hear her crying still. He was deeply moved: he could never bear to see a woman cry. He decided to mollify her. But next morning he waited till half past six and still she had not arrived. He began to fear that she was offended and would not come again. But at that moment she entered. As she was about to take up her pose, Pieter went up to her and put his arm round her shoulders.

"Erica. . . I hope I haven't hurt your feelings."

"Hurt my feelings? How?"

But Pieter was suddenly deeply disturbed. He told himself that his touch had been a mere friendly gesture. Now he realized his hypocrisy and knew that he desired her. He pressed her naked body to him; their faces met.

"Leave me alone, please," said Erica without a single gesture of resistance. "Let me go. I find this very boring."

"I won't let you go." Pieter searched for her lips.

But her lips did not respond. She opened her mouth and all he found was her teeth.

"Why don't you let me kiss you, you bitch," Pieter panted.

"Because you bore me extremely," she answered without the slightest trace of interest. "If it gives you any pleasure to crush me in this way, go ahead. Meanwhile I'll look out of the window."

She turned away her head, but Pieter held her still closer.

"Tell me at once what you are thinking about."

"I am thinking how nice it will be when you let me go."

Pieter suddenly felt a deep disgust with himself. He turned away and stared at the floor. Erica went back to the table and took up her pose. Pieter came to his senses; he returned to his easel and picked up his brush. At last he looked into her face.

"Forgive me. It will never happen again."

"Of course it will," she replied indifferently. "But it doesn't matter. I

am glad that you aren't angry. Most men are angry when such things happen."

"I am angry, too—but not with you. Let us work now. I've had enough of this pose. Will you please sit on the floor with your back to me. I'm painting the other female figure now."

"Very well," she said obediently. "Will this do?"

"Put the stool under your right elbow and look to the left. . . . Not so far. That is right now. Stay like that."

His intoxication vanished abruptly. Startled, he realized that if this woman were to jump to her feet and embrace him, he would be the indifferent one now. He knew now that she was not a human being. He worked hard for an hour without saying a word. While she was dressing, he counted out her wages.

"Here is the money I owe you, *signora*. I shall not need you again."

"You don't need me any more?" she echoed in surprise.

"No. I won't trouble you further. I can finish the picture without a model."

"All right. When and where will the picture be exhibited?"

"Some distinguished friends of mine will inspect it here in my studio."

"Well, if they ask who the model is, tell them that my name is Erica and that I am at Viviani's every evening."

"Which Viviani's?"

Erica laughed loudly for the first time since they had met.

"You don't even know that? The gambling den, of course. And what will happen afterward to the picture?"

"I am sending it to the Ducal palace at Mantua. The Duke has ordered it."

"What? It will be hung in Mantua? And you didn't tell me before? You're a wicked man. The devil take you."

And with these words the loveliest woman that Pieter ever saw left him. When the picture was finished, he did not invite many guests—he showed it to Elsheimer, the Doctor, and Magno. He then took the box containing the picture to the Residence.

"Don't count on the Duke's seeing this picture soon, *fiammingo*," said Magno. "The Duke is no longer in Mantua. He's traveling with a retinue of thirty horsemen through Switzerland to Nancy where he's to stay with his daughter, the Countess of Lorraine. From there he is going to Spaa

for his cure, and then he'll carry out his plan of visiting Brussels and Antwerp that he mentioned to you last year. It's a pity you weren't in Mantua; he would certainly have taken you with him."

"Why didn't you tell me of this before?" cried Pieter in astonishment.

"Because I didn't know. As always, the Duke decided on the spur of the moment to make the journey, and even now it's by no means certain that he will keep to his itinerary."

"After all, it really doesn't matter. My mother's health is no worse, and I have to finish the picture for the Oratorians."

And it was indeed high time for him to fulfill his promise to the Oratorians. July had come and, although some of the other painters had not yet finished their pictures, he needed the money badly. At last he finished the three pictures on slate. Serra accepted them, and they were put into position in the church.

One September morning he received a letter from home. As he read it, his hands trembled. Philips wrote that their mother was very ill; Pieter should leave his work and come home at once by the shortest route.

It took him one day to settle his financial affairs. Magno let him have sufficient of his arrears of pay to cover the cost of the journey. When his horse was at the door, he snatched a few moments to write to Chieppio. The gravity of his mother's condition, he wrote, left him with no alternative but to leave Italy without the Duke's permission.

At the outskirts of the Eternal City he reined in his horse and gazed back with the feeling that he would never return.

XV

During the long and tedious journey Pieter observed little of the beauties and manners of the countries through which he passed. His thoughts were with his mother, whom he had left when he was twenty-three. More than eight years ago! Now he was a man, a man with a career and a reputation—but still her son. How they would hurry to each other's arms! Then a shadow crossed his face. He was hurrying because his mother was ill. Would she ever hold him in her arms again? She was old now, more than seventy-two.

Yes, he was thirty-one. God had given him great gifts: a keen mind, a rare memory, an aptitude for languages, a good appearance, and best of all, a remarkable talent for painting. And how had he used these gifts? His fame was considerably less than that of some of his contemporaries. His fortune consisted of a small collection of curios and a few copies of classical statues. He had visited many courts, yet he held no rank. He was even uncertain of his artistic capabilities.

He looked back on the eight years he had spent in Italy. Much of the time had been passed in copying other men's works. And from this he had learned a great deal. He had copied Michelangelo's prophets on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; he had copied two Leonardos, two Raphaels, two Correggios, and innumerable others. He had probed the intimate secrets of Domenichino, Volterra, Mantegna, Tintoretto, Caravaggio, Giulio Romano. But what of himself? In his blackest moods he would say: "I have gained very much but I have lost myself."

He avoided Mantua—not merely because it was not on his way, but because he had cut himself loose from the place. Now he was certain that he would never return.

He crossed the Alps in dull autumn weather. Hope alternating with dejection enabled him somehow to endure the long ride down the valley of the Rhine. But the moment he set foot on Flemish soil an intolerable dread seized him. He reached Antwerp late one October afternoon in pouring rain. The streets were almost deserted. As he turned into Klooster

Straat, whose every stone and window were familiar to him, he felt a sudden desire to turn back lest he should learn the truth. But he went on. When he reached the house that he had not seen for eight years, there was nothing to betray its secrets to him. Two laughing children scampered past. They must have been babies when he had left. He jumped from his horse and knocked at the door. A few moments later Philips stood before him. His face told him everything. Pieter suddenly burst into stormy sobs. Philips, too, started to cry; the brothers clung to each other like frightened children.

When the horse had been stabled, the little servant girl brought them cheese and milk, and they began to talk.

"When did you get my letter, Pieter?"

"On the twenty-sixth of September."

"Then it was useless. Mother died on the twenty-first."

"Tell me everything."

"She behaved wonderfully. Her mind remained clear to the end. She spoke constantly of you and was afraid you wouldn't arrive in time—but she didn't feel your absence as bitterly as I expected. She told me she had said good-by to you when you went away."

"Yes," Pieter nodded. "When I left Antwerp, she said we were saying good-by forever."

"When she felt the end was near, she told me her last wishes. She told me to bury her in the church of St. Michiel Abbey—she had already arranged with the priest in which chapel. She enjoined us to look after Blandine's children as though they were our own—the girl is to be sent to a convent school, and the boy, as he wishes, is to become a priest. She asked me to make a note of the proportion of her savings that was to be distributed to the poor of the city. When she had settled everything, she began to sink peacefully."

"Did she leave any message for me?"

"Yes. She said: 'Tell Pieter that I thought of him with infinite affection. Tell him that he must marry and not forget me.'"

"Did she suffer much?"

"I don't think so. When the priest came to hear her confession—how little she has to confess!—she took the last sacrament. And after that she was much easier in her mind. I was alone with her when she passed away. I hardly noticed it—she went so quietly."

"What were her last words?"

"She spoke of our father. She said: 'Jan, darling, bad Jan.'"

Midnight came, and still they sat talking.

"We'll talk tomorrow about you, Philips. Let this evening belong wholly to mother."

Pieter slept little that night. He rose at dawn and slipped quietly from the house. The church he remembered, opened at six. He found the little chapel and the new grave. He threw himself on the cold stone and wept bitterly, for the first time giving free vent to his grief. Muffled footsteps passed. It was time for early morning Mass. People looked curiously at the tall, bearded stranger, but trod more softly.

When he left the church, the streets were crowded with early workers. Villagers, having already sold their produce, were coming from the direction of the Scheldt market on their way home. He saw the gabled houses, the dog at the heel of its master, the bonneted old crones hurrying home from Mass, the Spanish soldier with his halberd; and all this was part of his childhood, part of the Antwerp which was the center of the world for him. He felt at home and secure, and the knowledge was like balm to his heart.

Philips was dressing when he returned.

"Have you been there?" he asked.

"Yes. We should put up a marble memorial to her."

"I've just been thinking the same thing."

"Have you time to talk?"

"Yes. I don't have to be at the Town Hall before eight. Let's have breakfast. I've got some fruit for you. Of course oranges aren't so plentiful here as in Rome. But there are plenty of grapes and apples. Well, where shall I begin? My affairs are getting on well enough. Quite soon I'm likely to be appointed to a better post. Perhaps you remember that there are four secretarial posts that carry the rank of councilor with them. One of the holders, Jan Boghe, is very ill and won't last long, poor fellow. I shall probably step into his shoes. My Brabantization is taking its course already with the usual display of red tape. But, when I get my new post, I shall be in a position to have it speeded up. Then I shall marry at once. I'm so eager for you to meet Maria. If only poor mother could have lived to share my happiness. . . ."

Pieter said: "Listen, Philips. For you she died weeks ago. For me she

died yesterday. I can't bear to talk to people now. I shall ask for a cell in the Abbey for a fortnight, and shut myself up there. I want to pray and find peace if possible. You understand, don't you?"

"Perfectly, Pieter."

"Give my warmest greetings to Maria. My first visit will be to her. Don't tell anyone else that I am in Antwerp."

"Don't you even want to see Blandine's children?"

"No. If my luggage arrives, please unpack it for me. And order mourning clothes for me from your tailor. Our measurements are the same, I think."

"I'll see to everything. But wait a moment."

Philips left the room and returned carrying their book. He showed Pieter the inscription on the title page. "*Electorum libri duo*. By Philips Rubens. Illustrated by Pieter Paul Rubens. Printed by Balthasar Plantin at Antwerp." It was a pleasant volume.

"Thanks, Philips. I'm so glad to see it. But I won't take it with me, or even my sketchbook."

The next morning he was given a cell at St. Michiel Abbey. The monks received him with great kindness.

Pieter was accustomed to self-discipline, and he now proceeded to restore his mental health systematically as he would have set about the cure of a physical illness at Spaa. For the first time in his life he put his faith to the test; and by an immense effort he employed it to purge his heart of grief. He attended Mass, entering into the sacrament with all his might. He spent much time in contemplation and prayer. Every morning he went to confession. On the first occasion he found himself able to confess only minor sins; on the second, he acknowledged that he could not reconcile himself to the Will of God. Yet, despite his doubts, slowly his mind was healed. He found a friend in his father confessor and talked with the good old man for many hours. One day the priest gave him a book entitled, *The Imitation of Christ*; its author was said to be a German monk, Thomas à Kempis.

"But what does it matter who wrote it, my son?" the priest said. "Here, read this. . . ."

A fortnight later Pieter felt that the agony of his loss had faded into silent, resigned grief. On All Soul's Day he retired to his cell; this day

would belong to his mother and himself. Early next morning he returned to Klooster Straat.

"Philips," he asked his brother, "could you be spared from the Town Hall today? I'd like to spend the morning alone with you. At noon, if you care, we can visit Maria."

"I'll see about it at once."

He hurried away and returned in half an hour.

"I've got the day off," he said, "but there's a little difficulty. Maria has promised to have luncheon at her brother-in-law's, Brant."

Pieter glanced at him, and Philips reddened.

"Why are you staring at me like that?"

"You seem to be bent on making me meet that girl, Isabella. All right. But now let's hear your news. After all, it's more than eight years since I was in Antwerp."

"Of course you want to talk politics."

"Yes, but perhaps it might be as well if I did. You've seen much, but I've seen more. Do you remember how excited we got in our youth over Maurice, Duke of Orange—or at least if we as Catholics didn't quite approve of him he interested us intensely, because his mother and poor father . . . you know. Well, we've been the victims of a fatal mistake—just like the King of Spain. We thought that the cause of Flanders was bound up with the Dutch struggle for liberty—and so did His Imperial Majesty. And yet how different the cases are! I've talked to you about all this in Rome, of course, but only casually. Since then my views have matured. Flanders was ruled once by the Dukes of Burgundy, who handed our ancestors over to the keeping of the Counts of Flanders. If anyone asks where we belong, the answer is 'to France.' Yet, undoubtedly, the hereditary claim of Spain to our country is completely justified. If it's lawful that in the event of my death without issue the children of my wife's relatives should inherit my property, Spanish sovereignty cannot be questioned. Of course, all this has nothing to do with their treatment of us. How are things now?"

"Excellent. Archduke Albrecht is a well-meaning man; he likes us and tries to be just. Isabella is an angel on earth."

"Well—what would happen if all sovereigns were to declare the abolition of inheritance? Then we could argue whether we owe allegiance to

Henry IV or Philip III. But as things are there cannot be any doubt. You see, a rebellious youth has turned into a sensible man."

"Cicero: *De senectute*. . . . Go on."

"It's a childish dream to think of our forming an independent state. We are too few—they'd soon eat us up. Perhaps a time will come when we can seriously think of that—but we shall not live to see it."

"There is only one thing we can and must do. Avoid war."

"You know me better than yourself," Pieter smiled. "I have told you my opinion—now you tell me your news. What about the Dutch?"

"They're bargaining. Have you heard of Spinola?"

"Of course. Didn't I write you from Genoa that he was the Duke's host—and mine, too. I painted one of the Spinola ladies!"

"Oh yes, I remember. Spinola is now at The Hague, discussing terms with the Dutch as the Archduke's representative. There are two parties at The Hague. One wants to make peace at any price. The other, incited by the Duke of Orange, demands war against the Spaniards. The whole country is Protestant now, the Archbishopric of Utrecht has no occupier, the Dutch Catholics are ruled from Cologne by Bishop Sasbout. He's afraid to go home. But I think there will be no more war, at least for some time—old Olden-Barnevelt himself, who directs Dutch policy, wishes it."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"A very clever one. He is inclined to general tolerance and full confessional freedom. The world may think that the main cause of the strife is religion. But it isn't—it's India. The Dutch, as you know, are very skillful navigators, and even better traders. The Spaniards are no longer good at either profession. But we are living in an interesting age, Pieter: we are witnessing, after the destruction of the Armada, the control of the seas slowly passing from Spanish hands into others'—chiefly England's. But to return to our own affairs: for the time being, the situation is in every respect favorable for Flanders. At the Town Hall they think it certain that an armistice will be declared soon between Spain and Holland."

"I see. You have explained everything admirably. And now what news in Antwerp? How are our old friends?"

Philips had so much to tell that he did not finish before noon. He started with Balthasar, Pieter's best friend. He was now a staid burgher of thirty-five with the beginnings of a paunch. He directed the Moretus-Plantin

printing office with great knowledge and diligence. "Little" Nicolaas was already a family man; he had become a painter, a master member of St. Luke's Guild, not a very great artist, but a good craftsman. The Breughels were also well. Jan, Pieter's friend, had married, buried his first wife, married again three years ago, a Marienburg girl, and was fathering one child after another. He had become a most interesting painter—all his paintings were in blue and green. He never wore anything but velvet; in the town they called him "Vloeren Breughel." He was earning a great deal of money—every picture fetched at least a hundred and fifty guilder. It was said the Emperor Rudolf himself owed him seven thousand two hundred florins. Teniers, who had been a young apprentice when Pieter left, had wandered all over Germany, had returned and married the daughter of flat-footed Cornelissen who captained a boat on the Scheldt. There were young painters appearing every year; recently a young De Vos who had come from Hulst to Antwerp. Among the apprentices there was much talk about a young boy who was studying with Van Noort and showed great talent. His name was Jordaens. Then Philips came to the correspondence over Pieter between the Archduke and the Duke of Mantua. Philips said that he had visited Brussels several times to try and obtain Pieter's temporary release from the Duke's service; the Archduke himself had personally listened to his petition.

"What kind of a man is he?" asked Pieter.

"He is kind and well-meaning, but his appearance is so sour and glum that you would think him a chronic dyspeptic."

"And what happened?"

"The Archduke promised to get you your freedom. But, as I knew how such matters can be held up, I found out which secretary was to write the letter. He was an overzealous whippersnapper who had the bright idea that as you are a Flemish subject the Archduke could order the Duke of Mantua to release you. I warned him that such an attitude would cause trouble. But apparently he took no notice. But all that is past history. If you are ready, we can go to Brant's now."

Philips's impatience had been evident for the last half hour. He's in love, thought Pieter, smiling to himself. A short walk brought them to the Brant house. They found Jan Brant, the worthy town clerk of Antwerp, his wife, his daughter, and his sister-in-law sitting in the parlor under the great window with its leaded panes.

"Welcome, Pieter. There's no need for you to introduce yourself," cried Brant, jumping to his feet. "Now if you will excuse me for a moment, I'll go and put on my ruff."

Brant was a man of impressive appearance; his mustache and beard were completely white, although his hair was a fine dark brown. Pieter vaguely felt that he was being done a great honor when Brant went to put on his ruff. On his return, the town clerk found the company somewhat constrained and ill at ease. Pieter had to exert all his charm. He congratulated Maria on her forthcoming marriage; he congratulated Philips on having been fortunate enough to win such a charming girl. And his words were quite sincere. Maria was a pleasant, pretty young woman and quite obviously very much in love with Philips. Soon everyone was talking and laughing gaily.

After a few minutes Mevrouw Brant shepherded them into the dining room. Soon Philips and Brant were quaffing great quantities of beer, but Pieter pushed his stein away.

"You're not drinking?" asked his host.

"I rarely drink."

"These gentlemen should learn from you," laughed Mevrouw Brant. "They are rather too fond of raising their elbows."

"You see, Pieter, I am not even master in my own house. Don't ever marry, my boy."

But Pieter saw everything quite clearly. They wanted him to marry the Brant girl. And he smiled to himself. Their efforts would be wasted. The girl was by no means ugly, but he had no intention of marrying her. He wanted to marry a beautiful woman, a woman who would grace a fine household, a woman in whose possession men would envy him. He wanted a house in which he could receive the highest personages with credit. He was a citizen of the world, an artist accustomed to move freely among the great and the noble. Not for him the petty inconveniences and responsibilities of a burgher's life.

"I believe you have been to Italy?" said Pieter, turning to his host.

"Yes, of course. And we often talk of those days—we Romanists. Your father was a member of our circle, and now you, too, must join us."

A lively conversation about Rome began, in which only the men took part, though Mevrouw Brant put in a remark occasionally. Isabella listened quietly and respectfully. When the meal was finished, she helped

Maria to clear the table—she was, of course, trying to show what a good housewife she would be, Pieter reflected. The party soon broke up. Pieter and Philips left together.

“Well, how did you like Isabella?” was Philips’s first question as soon as the door closed behind them.

“She is quite nice,” said Pieter indifferently.

Philips was visibly disappointed by the answer.

“You must meet Maria’s parents, too,” he said.

“Certainly. Tomorrow, if you like.”

“Good. I’ll arrange it. Then you must see. . . .”

“You needn’t continue. I remember them all. First I want to look up my old friends, Balthasar, Nicolaas, and Breughel. Then I want to call on the two mayors, Halmale and Rockox. After that I’ll pay a visit to the General of the Jesuit Order, and some other priests. After that I shall go to Brussels and pay my respects to the Court.”

Philips stopped in the middle of the street, his face shining.

“So you have decided to stay at home?”

“Yes. I really think we shall have peace now. Besides, the Archduke has settled several religious orders here and they are well known to be great patrons of art. And then I hope the city of Antwerp is taking steps to replace all the works of art that have been destroyed.”

“Indeed yes. I can give you all the details. The city council has apportioned part of the budget to make good the loss, and one commission has already been given. Janssens is to paint Antwerp and the Scheldt, and he is to receive seven hundred and fifty guilders. I can promise to get you a commission at least as good as that.”

Philips seemed about to say something else; then he changed his mind and swallowed hard. Pieter guessed that he had been about to mention Isabella again. After a few steps, Philips said:

“I haven’t mentioned that Brant is a very rich man. I am to receive the same dowry as that he received at his own marriage, and apart from his wealth, his influence will be of great use to me. In the Town Hall he is highly thought of, and after my marriage my own standing will improve considerably. Both I and Brant will do everything possible to further your interests. You will never regret your decision to stay at home, I promise you.”

Philips was obviously trying to explain to him that if he married Isa-

bella he would be financially independent for life, and also enjoy the backing of an influential father-in-law. But Pieter remained silent. There were plenty of marriageable girls in Antwerp. And, before he began to think seriously of the matter, he wanted to settle down to his new life and renew his old friendships.

After visting Balthasar and Nicolaas, he went to see Breughel. He found him hard at work in a large studio, and saw at once that his work had matured almost beyond recognition. He noted that Breughel saw the whole world as blue, a blue that belonged to Milan and not to Flanders. And yet Italian influence had not in the least weakened his individuality. Every picture in the studio had a sky of deep-sea blue; even the outlines of his horizons were blue.

"Tell me, Jan," asked Pieter, "do you always see the landscape as blue?"

"Yes, I imagine it as blue."

"But it isn't a question of how you imagine it, but of how you see it."

"I don't bother with such niceties. This is the way I paint, and that's all there is to be said about it. Do you like it?"

"I am enchanted. You are worthy of your father, and he was a genius."

There was a gleam of excitement in Breughel's eyes.

"Yes, he was a genius, and there you touch the greatest source of worry in my life. You don't know the responsibility of having a genius for a father. For everyone else he has been dead for eighteen years, but for me he is terribly alive. And I must continue his work. It's a crushing burden. It's strange, you know; my brother doesn't feel the burden at all."

"By the way, how is your brother Pieter?"

"Oh, he's all right. Still painting his fires and alchemists' laboratories. But now let's talk about you. Do you intend to settle in Antwerp?"

"Yes. I feel that we painters are in for better days, what with the Church and the City. . . ."

"You have judged the situation quite rightly. The city fathers are in a fever to beautify the town. So are the ecclesiastical authorities."

"Would you put in a good word for me with the Jesuit General? I want to visit him."

"Gladly. I'll talk to him tomorrow. You could call on him the day after."

When Pieter saw the General he had a surprise that made him blush with happiness.

"I have been expecting you," said His Reverence. "I have heard that you

were in Antwerp. In a way you belong to our Order. You see, we have heard what a fine picture you painted in the Mantuan church of our Order to commemorate the Archduchess Eleanor. And let me compliment you on your drawings for the biography of our founder, Ignatius Loyola."

"You have heard of my work here?" said Pieter with some astonishment.

"We are fully informed on the domestic affairs of all our centers. I have it on good authority that your painting at Mantua is really excellent. And yesterday Breughel told me that you are a brilliant artist."

"Your appreciation makes me very happy, Reverend Father. I need it greatly. I intend to stay in Antwerp and offer my services chiefly to the Church. So I wish to ask if you know of any task on which I could employ my modest talents."

"I have been told that in both Mantua and Rome you lived a life pleasing to God, religious and temperate. The Church needs such artists. We shall not forget you. Do you know anything of our sodality?"

"Yes, Reverend Father, it is the Congregation under your wise guidance and dedicated to the spirit of the Annunciation."

"That is so. It is a young institution and as yet no permanent building has been erected to accommodate its members. But we try to adorn our temporary home according to our means. The main altar has no picture. I should like you to paint one for us. The subject will be, of course, the Annunciation. If you do the work well, you may count on us in the future."

Pieter thanked the General warmly for this his first commission in Antwerp and seized the opportunity to ask him to use his influence with ecclesiastical authorities in Brussels. The General readily promised and dismissed him with some paternal advice.

Pieter next visited the two mayors of the city. Halmale was a well-meaning nonentity. But Rockox was a man of wide learning and great vitality, who had many schemes for the improvement of Antwerp. His considerable fortune enabled him to gratify his passion for archaeology, and his collection of cameos was the finest in the city. After Pieter had examined the collection and looked over the library, Rockox said:

"You cannot imagine the care such a library requires. I have correspondents in many European cities who buy and sell books for me, and also put me in touch with other collectors. Only today I wrote to a Pro-

vençal gentleman, from whom I hope to obtain some fine books at very reasonable prices."

"Provençal," exclaimed Pieter. "May I ask the gentleman's name?"

"Certainly. Peiresc."

"It's a small world, Mynheer Rockox. Peiresc is a very good friend of mine."

"Indeed. An interesting coincidence. Where did you meet him?"

"In Florence. I was a member of the Duke of Mantua's retinue when he attended the wedding of Maria Medici and Henry IV in that city. We stayed at the same inn and became very good friends."

Mayor Rockox seemed quite excited by the information.

"Most interesting," he said. "I have never met Peiresc myself. What kind of a man is he?"

"It is difficult, Mynheer, to give an idea of someone you have never seen. . . . Well, Peiresc is not a tall man nor can he be called handsome. He has a very large mouth and a swarthy face, a little like that of a frog. . . . I confess I find it difficult to describe him. . . ."

Pieter stopped seeking for words. Rockox waited for him to continue.

"Don't think me conceited, Mynheer," Pieter said, "but I consider that mankind is in many respects still very primitive. We ought to have discovered some way of making the faces of our acquaintances and friends known to those who have not met them. A man's features can tell us much about him. Oral descriptions are always unsatisfactory. No matter what I tell you about Peiresc, you won't be able to *see* him. . . . Wait, let me try to describe him in another way. Have you any writing materials handy?"

Rockox pointed to the desk. Pieter dipped the quill into the inkwell, stared into the air as if he wanted to recall a moment from the past. Then he sketched a face in a few firm, quick lines.

"There . . . that is what remains in me of Peiresc."

Rockox looked carefully at the sheet of paper. After a long pause he said:

"Don't think me conceited either, Rubens, but I venture to say that these few lines have given me the essentials. I think if I chanced to meet the man I should recognize him, clap him on the shoulder and say: 'Sir, you must be Peiresc—my compatriot Rubens has introduced us.'"

Pieter smiled. He was glad that his draftsmanship had met with such

success. But he was careful not to betray his self-satisfaction. He continued modestly:

"Your words, Mynheer Mayor, remind me of a Roman impression of mine. I was visiting the Orsini Palace, famous for its classical collection of statues. And there I had a startling idea. I felt that I could tell which statues really resembled their models and which didn't. There is a relation between the features, the shape of the head, and the general proportions of the body—a relation which we grasp at once. We say to ourselves when we are looking at a statue: 'Yes, there *are* such heads, we have met such men or women in real life, or if we haven't we recognize that we may meet them. Some other statue, on the other hand, may not convince us at all. We feel that such people couldn't exist. . . . I don't know whether you consider all this mere idle chatter. . . . I have never spoken to anyone else about this. . . . I have felt it was my own secret. . . ."

Rockox, the reserved and proud Mayor, seemed quite moved.

"You have chosen the right person to tell it to, my friend. And I fancy the things you say about statues are equally true of paintings."

"Oh yes. I am sure I am right. No art can exist without the human reference."

The Mayor nodded.

"*Homo sum*," he said, "*et nihil humanum a me alienum puto*. Do you know Latin, Pieter?"

"Like Flemish, sir. 'I am human and nothing human is alien to me.'"

"Well, I'll tell Peiresc about our meeting when I write to him. As for your future, have no fear. The city of Antwerp has never yet failed its worthy sons. I hope you'll visit me again. There are many well-educated and traveled men in Antwerp, but it's a long time since I have had such an enjoyable talk."

"Thank you," Pieter replied, "but I won't bother you for a few days. My brother's future causes me anxiety, and I have to think of my own future, too. I'd like to go to Brussels to pay my respects to His Highness—provided he will receive me."

Rockox was a shrewd man. He nodded sagely.

"You're a wise man, Rubens, and I understand you perfectly well. Don't worry about your brother, he'll be given a secretaryship as soon as one is vacant. As for you, I shall take care that by the time you appear before His Highness, he shall be informed of Antwerp's warm interest in you."

Yet Pieter was not yet satisfied. He had discovered that Flanders, too, had its court painters. The Archduke Albrecht, Governor of Flanders, had recently granted that title to Van Veen, Pieter's old master. Pieter did not want to injure his teacher's interests; he still had a feeling of gratitude and love for him. But he reflected that he was as good a painter as Vaenius and that if he tried to obtain the title for himself he would not be acting in a manner harmful to the older man. If Vaenius, that distinguished man and mediocre painter, had been given the title, a real artist, even though of humbler origin, should be worthy of a like distinction. Pieter called on his former master and drew him out skillfully, trying to discover whether he would be pleased if an old pupil of his won the distinction, in that way increasing his own prestige; Vaenius declared that not only would he have no objection, but that he would do his utmost to support Pieter's claim.

One day the official notification arrived from Brussels: the Archduke would receive Pieter in audience. The news arrived at the same time as that of old Boghe's death. The two brothers thus found their way open to their respective goals: Philips could take up the secretaryship, while Pieter was entitled to expect considerable benefit from the patronage of the Governor.

He traveled to Brussels, paid his respects to the Chief Court Chamberlain, and visited his friends. At the appointed hour he was waiting in the crowded anteroom of the audience chamber. Most of the others were priests.

At last his turn came.

The Archduke Albrecht, son of the Emperor Maximilian, was in his fifties, and by no means a handsome man. His thin face was fringed with a sparse, reddish beard; his broad, drooping underlip showed his Hapsburg ancestry. He nodded kindly to Pieter but remained standing and did not ask him to be seated.

"Rubens, isn't it?" he asked in Latin.

"Petrus Paulus Rubens, at Your Highness's service. I beg permission to express my most humble gratitude to Your Highness."

"For what do you have to thank me?"

"The great honor of the commission which I received from Your Highness seven years ago, when I painted an altarpiece for the Church of the Holy Cross at Jerusalem."

"Oh yes, yes, I remember. I have heard nothing but praise of your picture in Rome, and now I wish to express to you my personal appreciation. I am told that you are going to settle in Antwerp."

"That is my intention, Your Highness. It gives me great happiness to enjoy the peace and prosperity which the wisdom of Your Highness has procured for us."

The Archduke sighed.

"Oh, but with what difficulty! How much trouble there is in the world!"

He glanced up and continued in a different tone.

"My kinsman, Duke Vincenzo, would not permit your return. I remember. How did you manage to get home?"

"My mother's illness brought me back. Alas, she was dead when I arrived. And now my affairs do not permit me to return to Mantua. I have already written to His Highness the Duke and thanked him for his kindness."

"You were his court painter, I believe?"

"One of them, Your Highness. The other was Pourbus, also a subject of Your Highness. He is in Mantua now, so that the Duke can well dispense with my services. But I could no longer bear to be parted from my country."

"I am surprised to hear that anyone can have his fill of Rome."

"I never had my fill of Rome, Your Highness. Only of being away from my country. . . ."

During the last few sentences the Archduke had been glancing at his desk and reading the name and business of the next on the list. Pieter was alarmed to realize that his opportunity would soon be past.

"I am sure Your Highness remembers with great affection the Eternal City where your former companions still speak so highly of Your Highness."

"Of me? Who speaks of me in Rome? What former companions do you mean?"

"It is known to me that Your Highness was once the Cardinal of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, and by your former companions I mean your fellow cardinals—for instance Cardinals Cesi and Montalto, in whose palaces I have been a frequent guest."

The Archduke's face betrayed his interest.

"Oh, you know them? Well tell me about them. . . ."

And Pieter talked. As vividly and interestingly as he could. The Archduke listened, sitting in his armchair, and now and then asked a question.

"A very pleasant man," he said of a certain prelate. "He visited me when I was Archbishop of Toledo. I remember, he joined me at Madrid."

"Madrid has changed greatly. Your Highness would scarcely recognize it."

"Oh, you have been to Madrid?"

Pieter described his Spanish mission. The Archduke pulled the bell rope and said to the secretary who entered:

"Please ask Her Highness to join me, if she is free to do so."

Then he turned to Pieter with great affability.

"Now you'll have to tell us everything you know. Her Highness will be delighted to hear news of His Majesty, her brother. So you know the Duke of Lerma?"

"I spent a long time on his estate at Ventosilla."

At that moment Isabella entered. She was a plump, jovial-looking lady, noted for her piety and marital fidelity.

"Let me present to you," the Archduke said in Spanish, "the painter Rubens, who has much of interest to tell us about your brother's Court."

Pieter bowed deeply, swept his feathered hat so low that it brushed the ground, and said in Spanish:

"I would be happy indeed if my modest words should merit the interest of Her Highness."

"Let us sit down," the Archduke said. "Pray be seated, Mynheer Rubens. I see that you speak Spanish."

"And very well, too," Isabella added. "Well, tell us all about your visit to His Majesty."

Pieter began his tale. A courtier entered the room, but the Archduke told him curtly that the others should wait and then nodded to Pieter to go on. When he mentioned the luxury of the Castle at Ventosilla, the Archduke and the Archduchess exchanged a glance. Probably they also had heard the gossip which accused the Duke of Lerma of peculation. Pieter's story took a long time. The secretary came in once more; the Archduke looked at the clock and told him to send the audience seekers home, as he would receive no one else that day. And Pieter was still

answering questions when another courtier entered by a different door and announced that lunch was served. Pieter jumped to his feet.

"What a pity," Isabella said. "But couldn't Mynheer Rubens come again? He has told us nothing yet about Mantua and Florence."

"By all means," nodded the Archduke. "Come again tomorrow, Rubens. We must thank you for an enjoyable hour—I hope you will have as interesting news to tell us tomorrow."

They nodded kindly to Pieter, who bowed himself out. In the anteroom he was at once surrounded by a crowd: the punctilious Archduke had never before given such a long audience to anyone who had no state business to discuss. When he told them that he had been invited for a second audience, they looked at him in amazement.

Next day both the Archduke and his wife were present. They bade him sit down and talk. The audience lasted for over an hour.

"I will not deny," the Archduke said at last, "that you have told me facts which are most useful to me. And it is not my habit to allow any service to go unrewarded. I shall order a painting from you, Rubens."

"You make me most happy, Your Highness."

"Paint me a madonna with the infant Jesus. It will be a gift for Her Highness."

"I thank you humbly for your confidence in me, Your Highness. I shall report to you when the picture is finished."

When he took his leave, Pieter told himself in elation that he had won his fight—the good will of the Court was his.

In the anteroom he was greeted with great deference as a person enjoying the confidence of the Archduke.

"Did he mention the Moors?"

"No, why should he?"

"Haven't you heard that on the advice of the Archbishop of Valencia they are being driven from Spain?"

He was given news which had just arrived from Spain. The Moors were in a state of revolt. They were seeking help both in Constantinople and in Africa; they had even turned to Henry IV, Spain's bitter enemy, for support. The whole country was in confusion. When Pieter left the palace, he was thinking of Ventosilla and the little Moorish girl who used to slip into his studio every evening.

Back in Antwerp, he told Philips of his success at Court. And his

brother, too, had good news. He had received the expected post in the Town Hall and his wedding was fixed for the twenty-sixth of February. He asked Pieter to undertake all the arrangements for the wedding and the feast which was to follow. Everything was to be on a lavish scale; no expense was to be spared. All Antwerp was to hear of the two Rubens brothers.

The wedding passed off without a hitch. The procession made a brave show. Pieter escorted Isabella Brant. At the sumptuous banquet the drinks and sweetmeats were served by apprentice painters. Pieter sat next to Isabella at the table, and he did his best to entertain her, but she responded shyly, saying little.

"Look, what a handsome boy!" exclaimed Pieter as an apprentice paused beside them to offer sweetmeats.

"Yes, he really is a beautiful child," replied Isabella softly.

"Wait a moment, my son," said Pieter as the boy was about to move on. "So you want to become a painter?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy.

"Where are you working?"

"With Master van Balen."

"Indeed. You have started early. How old are you?"

"Ten."

"And what's your name?"

"Anthony, Anthony van Dyck, at your service, sir."

"Very good, my boy. Now go on with your sweetmeats. But see that you are polite to our guests."

The child moved away, and Pieter glanced at Isabella. She was looking after the boy. Her face was transformed by a curious beauty he had never seen in it before.

"Do you love children very much?" he asked.

She seemed startled.

"I adore children," she said. "Whenever I see a child, I feel curiously moved."

Pieter gazed at her face as if for the first time.

XVI

From that moment at Philips's wedding feast, Pieter tested Isabella unobtrusively but persistently. He had discovered that she had a fine and sensitive nature, deeply hidden perhaps, but well worth coming to know better. He began to tell himself that he should marry this girl, and smiled a little to think that he had rejected her so decidedly after their first meeting. But he was resolved not to hurry matters.

Isabella pleased him, though after a time he was not sure whether she did not know quite well that he was testing her. She showed every sign of being an excellent housewife. She did not love money, but she loved the things money bought: fine furniture, beautiful linen, the solid comfort of a home. But there was still the possibility that he might find a serious flaw in her. He spent much time at the Brants, and her parents left them a good deal alone. He never mentioned love. Indeed, his demeanor was not that of a lover but of a diplomat carrying out a confidential mission. Isabella knew no English, German, or Latin; she had no direct acquaintance with the great classics. But her father was steeped in the classical authors, Cicero in particular, and she had learned much from him. She had a good knowledge of French and Spanish. She loved books and read everything she could lay her hands on. Pieter listened to her and watched her with cool objectivity.

She was respectful and affectionate to her parents; she had a strong sense of family unity. Her deepest characteristic was her adoration of children.

Pieter observed her, studied her, and he had to confess that she would make a perfect wife. There remained only one point upon which he wished to reassure himself: what was her attitude to art? He was now working on two pictures simultaneously, the one for the Jesuit Congregation and the one for the Archduke Albrecht. Soon after Philips's wedding he was asked to dine with Rockox, who wanted to show him some of the latest additions to his library. After he had admired the new treasures, Rockox took him by the arm and said:

"I didn't ask you here merely for selfish reasons, Pieter. I want to tell you something that will please you and perhaps the citizens of Antwerp, too. There is no picture in the large council chamber of the Town Hall. I have suggested to the Council that we should have one, and that the subject should be the Infant Jesus and The Three Wise Men from the East. I have also suggested that you should paint it. Well, will you accept the commission?"

"Why do you ask me, sir? Is there any painter in the world who would not?"

"Good. I hope that no one in the Council will oppose the plan. But you must tell me frankly how much you expect for the picture."

Pieter calculated quickly.

"One thousand eight hundred guilder, Mynheer Mayor."

"I see. It isn't a small sum. Breughel never asked as much. However, I won't bargain with you. But it will all depend on you; when the picture is ready the Council must not blame me but must feel grateful to me."

"I shall not fail you, sir, I promise you."

Now he had three commissions which required all his attention, for his future depended on them. He took care that Isabella should see all three sketches. She called at his studio in Kloster Straat, duly chaperoned by her mother. Pieter explained the sketches and watched her expression. She said little but responded excellently: she did not display any exaggerated enthusiasm, nor did she try to feign any expert knowledge. When Pieter asked her bluntly for an opinion, she said:

"Don't put me to shame, Pieter; I'm ignorant in these matters. I can only say which of them I like best—and even there I find it difficult to choose. In two of the pictures there is an Infant Jesus, in the third there are all these little angels, and you know how I adore children, so I cannot be impartial."

"But don't you want to form an independent opinion? Do you accept mine without question?"

"Blindly, Pieter."

Pieter was well satisfied with his investigation. Isabella was much too modest. She possessed excellent taste, and her remarks about other paintings, although they were inexpert, betrayed the right instinct. Her attitude toward his own work was of final importance: as a wife she would not try to interfere with his work, yet could be trained to help him with

her natural taste. This was the moment when he decided to marry Isabella Brant.

But he did not speak of his resolve. He still decided to wait. He had no rival to fear; no suitors frequented the Brant house. Clara, Isabella's younger sister, was still a child. Pieter was the only male visitor, and her parents did everything to make him welcome. Every day, after dusk made it impossible to work, he called on them, then spent a short time at the guild house of the painters and went to bed early as was his habit. He still did not speak of love.

By settling in Antwerp he had automatically become a member of the Romanist Society. Their Dean—the name given to their President—was "Velvet" Breughel; he was also the President of the painters' guild. Philips had been a member for some time, and Pieter was now elected unanimously. He frequently attended the meetings, which offered ample opportunity for interesting talk. Rockox was always present. Balthasar Moretus, his old friend, Wouverius, the scientist, Van Thulden, the jurist, Gevartius, the city clerk and historian, were all members, as were a number of rich merchants like Van der Geest and Swertius, whose culture was equal to that of the artists.

The Romanists prided themselves on helping one another outside their circle. The town clerk helped the merchant, the merchant procured commissions for the artist. Pieter quickly became popular with them; his courteous manners soon won him the good will of all. After he had achieved success with one or two pictures, he could count on commissions from the rich burghers, and these commissions would be very useful additions to those of the court and the Church.

He finished first the picture for the Archduke. Everybody liked it; art connoisseurs, other painters all spoke of it with apparently sincere admiration. He invited Isabella and her family for a private view; the girl did not say a word, but tears came to her eyes when she saw the Child.

"Well, do you like it?"

"It's lovely. But do *you* like it, Pieter? That's the most important thing, you know."

Pieter concealed the joy the question brought him.

"Yes, I like it. And you don't know what it means for me to speak out like this. I'll explain later."

That evening Pieter spoke frankly of the doubts he had had in Mantua

and Rome concerning genius; how he had begun to fear that he would be only a pale ghost of the masters he had so faithfully and reverently copied; a fine craftsman perhaps, but not a true artist whose every work proclaimed that it was his and his alone.

"May I say something about this, Pieter?" asked Isabella quietly.

"I wish for nothing more."

"I have noticed, Pieter, that you have your own opinion on everything. If you are so independent in your judgment of other things, why should you doubt your own pictures. I don't know enough about painting to say, for instance, how much an artist owes to Titian or Raphael. But I do know enough of you to be sure that you stand on your own feet."

"Thank you, Isabella. If you had asked some wise magician what to say to make me happy, you could not have pleased me more. Now I feel again what I felt when I looked at the finished picture with all the merciless impartiality I could summon: it is I, Pieter Paul Rubens, who painted it, and no one else."

Isabella did not reply, but her face was shining with happiness.

When Pieter arrived in Brussels with the picture, the Archduke and the Archduchess received him at once. The streets were filled with crowds, and there was a rumor that the peace of the Low Countries had been signed. After a little while he was admitted to the audience chamber. He carried the picture himself.

"Welcome, welcome," the Archduke greeted him in Spanish. "Since early this morning I have been talking to the most tiresome people. To chat with you will be a relief. And now let me see the picture. I have already sent for Her Highness. She will be here in a minute."

At that moment the Archduchess entered and smilingly stretched out her hand for Pieter to kiss. Pieter placed the picture in the best possible light. After looking at it for some minutes, the ducal pair exchanged glances and said, almost together, "Lovely." And they repeated the word several times as they examined the work in greater detail. The painter modestly stepped back a few paces. The Archduke motioned to him to sit down.

"Well, what do you say to the glad news, Rubens?" he asked.

"I have heard rumors that peace has been concluded, Your Highness; but I scarcely dared to believe such happy tidings."

"But you must believe it. The terms have been agreed on. Only the

treaty itself remains to be signed. You may carry the news to your own city. We are to sign a truce of twelve years. Not a peace, you understand, for Olden-Barnevelt demanded the recognition of the independence of the Dutch provinces, to which we can never agree. And, although I myself have gone to the utmost limits of religious toleration, I could never grant independence to the rebellious and heretical Dutch."

"To the very utmost limits," echoed the Archduchess.

"So the only alternatives left were a continuance of the struggle, or a truce. I chose the latter course, and representatives of the countries have come to an agreement at Berg op Zoom. I repeat, Rubens, for twelve years there will be no war. We shall be able to devote ourselves to the arts of peace and the worship of God."

Pieter knelt down suddenly and kissed the Archduke's hand.

"Thousands of families will include Your Highness in their prayers. Will you permit me to tell you what these twelve years will mean for Antwerp?"

"Please do so. It is seldom that I hear a frank opinion."

Pieter described the miseries Antwerp had endured in the past; how the city had prospered and then fallen on evil days; the impoverishment of the citizens; their hopes and fears; and finally the coming of the Archduke and the benefits his enlightened statesmanship would bring. Ships would be launched and trade recover; money would flow into the beautiful city, and palaces be built; art would flourish. And for all this the people would have to thank the Archduke. His Highness had always been respected, but now he would be loved.

The archducal pair listened to Pieter with attention and evident emotion. Isabella said simply:

"Rubens, you are a wise and kind man. I have seldom met anyone like you."

"Her Highness is right," said the Archduke. "You indeed deserve our favor. Tell me, how can I reward your service?"

"For me, Your Highness, peace is the greatest possible reward. But, if you single my humble person for special favor, I can only ask you to make it easier for me to marry."

"So you are getting married," said the Archduchess, who was well known to be an ardent matchmaker. "And what is the girl's name?"

"I am marrying the daughter of one of the city secretaries, Mynheer

LOVER OF LIFE

nt. It is difficult for a young artist to make his way, and therefore if
ur Highnesses must honor me, I beg that you will bestow on me some
ward sign of your favor."

The Archduke nodded.

I see that you are asking for the title of court painter. We'll talk about
t. But we cannot hurt the feelings of Van Veen."

For him it would be a new distinction, Your Highness. He was my
ster."

That sounds reasonable. But I must consider the matter carefully. Her
ghness and I have been thinking over our last conversation, and there
one or two points upon which we would like further enlightenment.
ll you answer a few questions?"

With the greatest pleasure, Your Highness."

The Archduke was interested to know certain details of the life at Val-
olid and Ventosilla. And in particular he was anxious to hear more
ut the Duke of Lerma—his way of life, which was famous through-
Europe for its great luxury, whether he was able to carry it on with-
serious financial embarrassment, the extent of his influence over the
g. Pieter at once grasped the trend of these questions. He considered
answer quickly but carefully. He owed gratitude to the Duke of
ma. He could not repay his kindness by speaking ill of him now. He
de it clear that the Duke's advice to the throne would carry weight
n if it concerned the King's relations with his own sister. Pieter was
newhat surprised at the eagerness with which the Archduke and the
hduchess listened to him.

Pieter left the palace happily conscious of his success. He reflected with
e amusement that the Governor of Flanders knew of his forthcom-
marriage, while as yet he had not breathed a word about it to Isabella
self. He had talked to a number of courtiers while awaiting the audi-
e and learned that the Moors had indeed been expelled from Spain.
ey had been herded in ships and sent to North Africa—each person
ng allowed to take only as many of his possessions as he could carry.
e sailors during the voyage had behaved brutally—killing many of the
a and abusing their womenfolk. Pieter listened with horror and
ught of Zaida.

Pieter now thought it best to get married as quickly as possible. Soon
r his return to Antwerp he went to dine with the Brants. Philips and

life—ridiculously happy and always holding hands—were also present. Pieter was speaking of his audience with the Archduke.

“Announced to Their Highnesses,” he said casually, “that I was about to be married, and they showed a most flattering and kind interest. I think we may now fix the date of the wedding.”

Philip’s face shone; the rest of the company, however, took the announcement quite quietly. Both Isabella and her parents had regarded the matter as settled for a long time. Isabella glanced at Pieter and then lowered her eyes, blushing slightly.

“I think you should marry some time in October,” said Brant. “It will give you some time to furnish a house. But perhaps you thought of living with us at first?”

“Yes, I thought of that. But after dinner let us look at the calendar.” The talk then passed on to other matters, particularly the truce, the news of which had excited all Antwerp. After dinner Brant nodded to Pieter and they retired to the smaller living room. They briefly discussed the financial side of the marriage. Mevrouw Brant was then asked to join them and together they fixed October 3 as the date of the wedding.

Pieter finished the altarpiece for the Jesuits before the wedding. It gave him even more pleasure than the picture he had painted for the Archduke. Since his return to Flanders, he had thrown off many of the Italian influences which he felt had cramped his style. These influences had, however, become a part of his being, but they no longer made themselves felt in his composition, his choice of color, or his brushwork. He was delighted to meet the new painter who inhabited his body. The Jesuit general was not lavish in his praise of the picture, but he declared at once that he would set about finding a new and big commission for him.

About the same time Pieter received another summons to Brussels. At this time the Archduke was alone.

“Unfortunately, I am very busy today, so we cannot talk long. But let me examine the contents of this case.”

Pieter thought that the case would contain his appointment as court painter. He opened it in excitement. But it contained instead a heavy gold chain of the kind worn round the neck on great occasions. Suspended from it was a solid gold medal showing likenesses of the Archduke and Archduchess.

"Don't thank me, Rubens. You must come again soon, and then we shall talk about everything."

Pieter carried home this treasure with delight, although he was a little disappointed that the Archduke had not seen fit to give him the post of court painter. He was in the midst of the wedding preparations—the ceremony was now only ten days off—when Rockox sent for him urgently. He went in some trepidation, thinking that the Mayor was going to demand the early delivery of the picture for the Town Hall; he had barely finished the sketch. But his fears were groundless.

"Congratulations, Pieter. You are court painter. The documents have just arrived from Brussels. You are to receive a salary of five hundred Flemish pounds a year, and there will be no necessity for you to reside in Brussels."

Pieter accepted joyfully the documents adorned with the many seals. Now there would be no lack of commissions. Much had happened indeed since his return from Rome scarcely a year ago. He thought of Isabella, and he was surprised to find himself filled with a strange warmth, a warmth for which he could find only one name. Strange, he said to himself, I am falling in love with her.

The wedding took place on October 3. The church was full to overflowing. The ceremony and the banquet were modeled on those of Philips's wedding, for Pieter had no wish to outdo his brother. It was plain to everyone that Isabella was head over heels in love with him. During the feast they whispered together, and the guests wagged their heads and winked knowingly.

"You know," whispered Pieter, "I have decided to paint the Infant Jesus and Mary in a barn with a thatched roof and no walls. Behind Mary will stand Joseph and the Wise Men from the East, accompanied by a numerous retinue. There will be lots of animals, including horses and camels, and in the retinue of the Wise Men there will be all kinds of strange fellows: a knight in armor, a little page, a bearded sage, a black slave, and so on. The colors already excite me. Just imagine the jeweled, purple cloaks, the turbans, the precious gifts, the censer, the gleaming breastplates, the egret feathers—and all at night in the shadows thrown by the torches. I want to juxtapose red and blue. I can see the play of light and shadow, the composition of the various groups. I cannot tell you how the picture excites me already. . . ."

"I am sure it will be wonderful," replied Isabella. "And thank God for the years we have before us. You will be able to paint many pictures, Pieter."

"More years for you than for me," he said. "I am thirty-two; you are eighteen. I am old enough to be your father."

They both laughed and turned to their neighbors. When Pieter remembered some new detail of the picture, he told her about it.

At dawn, as they lay in each other's arms, he said:

"Do you love me, Isabella?"

"I love you. And you me?"

"I adore you."

Perhaps neither of them found it surprising that this was the first time they had spoken of love.



BOOK TWO





I

THE young husband had to go to Brussels to take the oath of investiture in his new office as court painter. After that had been done, he was received in audience by the archducal pair. Pieter wore the golden chain they had given him.

"How are things with you, Rubens? We haven't seen you for a long time. Tell us about yourself."

"I have nothing but good news to tell Your Highnesses of myself. I am enchanted with married life. I have plenty of work and no financial worries. Indeed, I am thinking of buying a house."

"Excellent. Have you been granted the privileges of your office?"

"Yes, Your Highness. I pay no taxes; I am exempt from the billeting order, and I am not compelled to register my students with the St. Luke's Guild. I am deeply grateful to Your Highness that you have interceded with the City Council on my behalf in these matters."

"I can tell you that they kicked against it," the Infanta interposed. "They did not want to grant the same privileges to Breughel. Rockox, when he was here, explained to me that only two painters of the city are supposed to have these privileges. But now you have them as well as Vaenius. By the way, Rockox spoke very highly of your latest picture."

"I am glad to hear it, Your Highness, for Rockox has excellent taste. Indeed, he is so pleased with my picture of the Three Magi that he wants to give me a silver cup as a special reward—in addition to my remuneration from the City Council, which cannot be increased. He intended it as a surprise, but the silversmith let it out when I saw him."

Their Highnesses nodded kindly, but their faces showed that their thoughts were elsewhere.

"Tell me, Rubens—I know you are a discreet fellow and that our conversation will not go any farther—what are people in Antwerp saying about the Duke of Condé and his wife?" the Archduke asked suddenly.

"People are talking all kinds of nonsense, because few of them know the truth, Your Highness."

"Then you know the truth?" asked the Archduchess, her eyebrows raised slightly.

"I think I do, Your Highness. I have many sources of information. I have been told that His Majesty Henry IV in his old age began to show an embarrassing interest in the daughter of the Duke of Montmorency. So he married her off to the young Duke of Condé in order to keep her at Court. When His Majesty began to pay marked attention to the bride, the young husband very wisely decided to fly to Brussels."

"You are remarkably well informed. But why do you call the young Duke's action wise?"

"Because by coming here he has—in a manner of speaking—placed himself under the protection of the Imperial Court of Spain, King Henry's most powerful and formidable enemy, Your Highness. He can reasonably hope that His Majesty will not dare to take any steps against him."

"You gauge the Duke's motives accurately enough. But you do not know, Rubens, that Henry *has* taken steps. He is endeavoring to secure the extradition of the young couple. Nor must you forget that the Condés are Bourbons and the present head of that family considers himself the only lawful claimant to the French throne. Henry is fully aware of that, and in order to secure the succession he has provided his wife, Maria Medici, with three sons."

"I understand. May I humbly ask Your Highness what reply you gave to Henry's demand?"

"I refused it. We shall see what effect the refusal produces in Paris."

"I venture to predict that it will produce very little effect. Providence has intervened and caught King Henry in his own toils."

"What do you mean by that?"

"As Your Highness knows, the kernel of French policy is to threaten Spain perpetually with war. But now Henry is helpless. He knows quite well that he cannot carry the responsibility of plunging Europe into war because he wants to seduce a young woman. The little Duchess's presence here in Brussels is a guarantee of peace."

"You are a wise man, Rubens. It would strengthen public opinion if Antwerp were to discover the reasons for Henry's behavior. Naturally, I cannot issue a proclamation concerning so delicate a matter. But you could tactfully ventilate the matter—taking care not to reveal the source of your information."

"I shall be happy to be of service to Your Highness."

On his return to Antwerp, Pieter at once told his wife what he had heard "from a highly placed court official." He had seen the young couple as they entered a carriage in Brussels. The young Duke was twenty-one, his wife, the Duchess Charlotte Marguerite Montmorency, just turned sixteen. She was an extremely pretty child, and it was no wonder that she had set the royal rake's heart aflame. The French King was quite out of his wits: he had actually demanded the extradition of the young couple.

"It's disgusting, Bella," remarked Pieter. "That old fellow with the goatee ought to be burned."

Two days later Rockox told him that there was a threat of war. Pieter listened, and was duly incensed by the immorality of the King of France. But the Mayor had as well some news that was newer than his. The dynasty of the little Duchy of Jülich had been left without an heir. There were many claimants to the Duchy, the strongest claim apparently being that of the Protestant Elector of Brandenburg. Yet obviously the Hapsburgs could not permit a new Protestant power to appear on the fringes of the Spanish Low Countries. It was well known that the Elector of Brandenburg had a military alliance with France. So King Henry was about to declare war, not against Spain but against the Holy Roman Empire. Pieter returned home seriously worried.

"Pieter, I have found a house," said Bella happily as he greeted her.

They had been looking for a house for some time, but for one reason or another all the houses they had inspected so far had not appealed to them.

"What house have you found, my angel?"

"Doctor Backaert's house on the Wapper is for sale."

"Indeed. Not so long ago I heard that he would not sell at any price."

"He has changed his mind. He told my father he was afraid there would be a war."

"And with reason. I have heard bad news in the town. We must consider this matter carefully. We must not buy a house simply to have it burned down. On the other hand, war is only threatened; it hasn't been declared yet."

"Tell me about this war, Pieter."

He started to explain at once how matters stood. He had found that

Bella was loyal, industrious, an excellent housewife, but also interested in affairs outside her everyday life. Her judgment was acute, her perceptions sharp.

"I think we ought to start bargaining for the house at once," she said when he had finished. "We have the advantage of Backaert, for you are better informed. If you find out that there is to be war we can break off negotiations; if not we shall buy the house for a fair price."

"You are an angel, Bella. Has any price been mentioned?"

"He wants twelve thousand guilders. If he is prepared to reduce that sum a little, I think it would be reasonable. It would be as well to have a look at the house."

Next day they inspected the house. They saw at once that it was exactly the place they wanted. There was a large room which would make an excellent studio. The living rooms were well planned. There was a large plot of land surrounding the house, suitable for a kitchen garden, several outhouses, and a large courtyard. All the necessary changes could be made easily and at small cost.

"We can discuss the matter," said Pieter indifferently, in spite of his excitement. "But of course not on the basis of ten thousand guilders."

"I said twelve, Mynheer, not ten," replied Backaert.

"Oh, that's quite impossible. I cannot make you an offer; for, if you value your house so highly as that, any proposition I could make would seem an insult."

"All right, all right. My twelve thousand guilders are not as unalterable as Holy Writ. We can talk about that later. Tell me, Mynheer—you are a courtier, is there going to be war?"

"Alas, everything points to it. I am in serious doubt whether to buy a house at all."

"And why do you think war is practically inevitable?"

In the course of a long conversation Pieter succeeded in convincing Doctor Backaert that war was unavoidable and that it would spread to Flanders. But, after they had taken their leave, Pieter said to Isabella:

"We'll buy it. The place might have been built expressly for us."

"Even if war is so certain?"

"In the first place war is by no means as certain as I made out; but if it should come and the city is destroyed, our money won't be worth much

anyway. We'll buy the house. I want to make a lot of money this year, especially if war is likely."

Bella took Pieter's arm and looked at him lovingly.

"Tell me, Pieter, have you any faults?"

"What do you mean, you little silly?"

"You are handsome, clever, kind and good, and a great artist, and you love me. What faults could you have?"

"I have at least one. I am still not sufficiently myself in my work. But I am becoming myself more and more every day. And nothing could make me happier than that knowledge—except, of course, my love for you, my darling."

"No need to make reservations, Pieter. Your art comes first, and I must take second place. Perhaps you will think it strange if I say that your art is more important than yourself. It is the master of us both and our duty is to serve it. But you didn't answer my question. What faults have you—not connected with your painting?"

"I don't know," he answered with a puzzled smile. "I try to live honestly, and I know that I am kind according to my own lights. . . . Perhaps I thirst too much for wealth. I want to live in great state and luxury, and yet not as a spendthrift. I'd like to give our children a fine patrimony."

Bella glanced at him adoringly.

"Oh, I can hardly wait till they are born," she said softly. "But are these desires of yours a fault?"

"I don't know. When I was a child, I was always being told that Jesus loved the poor."

"That may be. But surely Jesus didn't intend that everyone should take the pilgrim's staff."

"Oh yes, Bella. He did—according to the Bible. And we are not doing it."

"But, if everyone took a vow of poverty, Pieter, who would there be to build fine houses and fill them with pictures? Art would die. Is it possible that Jesus sentenced art to death?"

Pieter pressed her arm.

"What a great help you are to a thinking man! God bless the moment when we first met. We'll buy the house, dear, as cheaply as possible, furnish it, and be very happy."

They went home, where Pieter's work and apprentices were waiting

for him. There were six of them, and unfortunately not one showed the least glimmer of talent. They had all been pressed on him by various influential persons, although he was the only painter in Antwerp who did not pay the usual wage to apprentices. He took little pride in them and merely contented himself with teaching them the elements of painting. He was glad when he could leave them alone and concentrate on his own work. The picture of the Three Magi was finished, and he invited a number of friends and acquaintances to see it: Philips and his wife, some other relations, Rockox, Moretus, a few members of the Romanist Society, some priests and painters. Everyone seemed delighted with the picture. The guests stayed a long time, and the wine flowed freely. Pieter hated to lose his sleep because of mere merrymaking, but the thought that the Council was paying him a thousand guilders on delivery of the painting and another eight hundred before next August consoled him somewhat.

He at once handed over the thousand guilders to his father-in-law, who dabbled in banking as a side line and was able to assure him a very favorable rate of interest.

Among the guests at the reception was a distinguished citizen of Antwerp called Cornelis van der Geest, an astute connoisseur whose judgment Pieter valued above that of any painter of his acquaintance.

"I have some news for you," this gentleman remarked after praising the picture highly. "I did not want to break it to you before I had seen the Three Magi. But now I will tell you. I know I'm doing a favor to the church in question, and not to you. It's an altarpiece."

"Oh, for which church?"

"The St. Walpurga. The money has already been collected. I know the curators of the church well, and they accept my advice on such matters without question. And I am sure it will give you great joy to hear that the choice of subject will be left to you. We need smaller pictures for the altar, too. And I have leave to discuss these with you, too. This commission will be well worth your while, Pieter. The total remuneration will be about two thousand six hundred guilders."

Pieter felt a little dizzy.

"You take my breath away, Cornelis. Let me think it over. What would I like to paint? Yes, I have it. The Erection of the Cross. I have painted that subject once before, but badly. Now I feel ready to tackle it again. If you agree, I'd like to try an experiment on this picture. I'd like to cut

right across the composition with the line of the Cross only half erected. I'd paint the executioners with straining muscles, the soldiers in shining breastplates, and on the Cross the newly crucified Savior."

He excitedly drew the line of the Cross in the air and added:

"It's lucky for me that you told me the remuneration beforehand; I would have been almost willing to pay to be allowed to paint this subject."

"Are you so enthusiastic about it?"

"I could dance for joy."

"Then the picture will be good. Go ahead with it. You have plenty to do, since there must also be two sidepieces, a picture of God the Father above the centerpiece, and three smaller pictures beneath it. These small paintings shouldn't give you much trouble, but I must tell you that the centerpiece in size alone is a formidable proposition. It will measure fifteen by twenty feet."

For answer Pieter embraced Van der Geest.

"You have given me such great pleasure that I have almost forgotten the danger of war."

"Yes, it is indeed a danger. Have you any news?"

Pieter had received reliable information that the French King was already in camp, as he desired to lead his troops in person. The Queen, who was pro-Spanish, was utterly unable to influence her husband. The conversation then turned again to the altarpiece, and it was arranged that Pieter, together with Cornelis, should meet the vicar and curators of the Church of St. Walpurga at the Zeeland Inn on the following afternoon to celebrate the signing of the contract with a glass of wine. Van der Geest took his leave.

Next day all the details were discussed. Pieter undertook to paint besides the chief picture, Christ on the Cross, St. Catherine among the angels, and the miracle of St. Walpurga.

"I shall always be proud that it was I who arranged all this. I hope you can start tomorrow."

"No, not until two weeks from now."

"But you seemed so enthusiastic. Perhaps you have some other work to finish."

"I have nothing more important to do, but I have to visit Brussels for a

day, and when I come back I want to paint something for my own pleasure—a portrait of my wife and myself.”

The vicar nodded approvingly.

“You are a young husband, my son. I can well understand that such a subject appeals to you. So you will start in a fortnight.”

“Yes, Reverend Father, and there is something of the utmost importance I must discuss with you. The lighting of every church is different; it is too long a tale to tell, but I had a most disappointing experience in Rome, arising from the bad lighting in the Church of the Oratorians. So I would like to paint this picture in the church. I will go there, with your permission, take some measurements, and have the scaffolding constructed. And now you must excuse me, for I go to bed with the sun. I want to thank you especially, Cornelis, for your kindness.”

When he arrived at the palace in Brussels the first man he met greeted him with the question:

“Well, what do you say to the great news?”

“What news? I have heard nothing.”

“The King of France has been murdered.”

“How and by whom?”

“I don’t know. But the courtiers may have more information.”

Pieter hurried to Salinas, one of the Privy Councilors.

“Is it true, Your Excellency?” he asked.

“It is. The courier brought the news scarcely an hour ago. Henry IV was taking a last drive through Paris before going off to camp. A man called Ravailac, about whom we know nothing, jumped into the carriage and stabbed the man twice. There is great confusion and uncertainty in the French capital, and the whole army has disbanded. If the nine-year-old Dauphin becomes King, he will rule as Louis XIII. We have been spared war, Rubens, and there is no doubt that the Queen will dismiss Sully.”

“How have Their Highnesses received the news?”

“In a manner worthy of them. They at once went to pray for the soul of the dead King. The Duke of Condé is preparing to leave Brussels at once; he can now take home his pretty little wife without fear. Don’t expect an audience today.”

“I would not dream of disturbing Their Highnesses now. But may I ask Your Excellency to report to His Highness that I have been here, and

say to him that two intermediaries have given peace to Flanders: on one occasion His Highness, on the other, Almighty God."

An ironical expression passed over Salinas's clear-cut Spanish features.

"Don't forget that His Highness was helped by his faithful partisans, and so was Almighty God."

Pieter bowed and smiled.

"I take it I am expected to forget those words."

He hurried back to Antwerp and went to Rockox before calling at his house. The Mayor had not yet heard the news, and he listened to Pieter in great excitement. He sent for his colleagues and then with a gay, sly look took a silver cup from a carved box.

"Tell me, do you know any other city fortunate enough to possess a mayor so liberally supplied with foresight? This cup is for you as the bringer of good news."

"Well, I doubt the foresight, Mynheer. I have known of this cup for a long time, and I am deeply grateful for it."

"Oho; but you can't take it away with you. It will be presented to you with great solemnity at the next meeting of the Council. Incidentally, I have heard what a fine commission you have received. Van der Geest told me. By the way, can you take on one more apprentice?"

"I am afraid it is impossible. I have a waiting list for the next two or three years. Those on the list are to join the studios of other masters and spend their time usefully there until I can take them. Will you ask your candidate to do the same? And now I must hurry home to my wife."

As soon as he had greeted Bella, he sent for Philips and his wife.

"It's the greatest luck imaginable," he said as they discussed the turn events had taken.

"Of course it isn't," replied Philips. "In a few months you will become an uncle."

And this announcement really did cause greater excitement than the assassination of the French King. Maria blushed deep red and everybody embraced her. She and Philips glanced at each other like conspirators and then at Bella.

"Leave Bella alone," remarked Pieter. "I am starting to paint her tomorrow in her finest dress and I want it to fit her. After that I don't mind."

Next day he started work on the picture. He himself was seated on a bench beneath a flowering tree, Bella beside him on the grass. The dress

was really lovely, the bodice of white satin embroidered with gold and pale green, the jacket of black silk with broad cuffs of golden lace, the skirt violet silk with heavy gold braid, the petticoat blue with gold lining, the tall sugar-loaf hat of the very latest fashion, yellow with an upturned brim; and beneath her charming chin was an elegant Spanish ruff. The picture was soon finished, and they hung it in a place of honor.

"That was a relaxation," said Pieter. "Now I shall paint a real masterpiece."

He made several sketches; and, although none of them completely satisfied him, he did not lose patience. To make the beam of the Cross the main feature of the composition was not a new idea—Tintoretto had already done it. Two years ago, filled with doubt in his talent, he would not have dared to tackle such a subject. Now he shrugged his shoulders; this picture would be by Pieter Rubens and by him alone. He was no longer afraid of having his own genius sidetracked by foreign influences.

He spent much time over the sketches, for he was unable to decide whether the Cross should slant to the left or to the right. But at last he was satisfied. And now for months he lived for his picture and nothing else. From sunrise to sunset he pondered the details of the composition, but his brooding was not a sign of uncertainty of purpose. The essentials of the picture had been clear in his mind from the beginning.

He got up at four every morning, rode for an hour, and then attended Mass. He spent the rest of the day in the Church, painting. The scaffolding was too close to the door of the building and few visitors could forgo the temptation of watching him at work; this disturbed him greatly. At last he asked for some sort of screen, but a piece of canvas large enough for the purpose was nowhere to be found.

"I have to attend to everything myself," he grumbled.

He went to the offices of the Antwerp Admiralty on the Scheldt. There he explained what he needed and was advised to consult a certain captain who had expert knowledge of sails and canvas. This gentleman said there would be no difficulty in fulfilling his wishes; and that same afternoon two sailors arrived at the Church carrying a piece of canvas big enough to hide a house. Pieter could now work in peace.

He had known from the beginning that he was painting a masterpiece, and that knowledge was so clear that he felt no fever or excitement as he worked. The picture showed Jesus already nailed to the Cross. With great

efforts nine men were raising the Cross into a vertical position, its lower end resting on the edge of the hole in which it would stand. The space he had to fill was rectangular, twenty feet wide, but from this had to be deduced the breadth of the two sidepieces. He was thus left with a space higher than it was broad in which to paint the slanting Cross. It was important that the spectator should realize that the immense efforts of the nine men made it impossible for the Cross to fall; yet at the same time classical tradition demanded that these men should all be engaged on different tasks. There was a soldier supporting the base of the Cross with his back, digging his feet into the ground. Beside him a muscular and almost naked executioner supported the beam with his arms, one knee pressed against it. Further to the left a soldier stared at the crucified man with terror and amazement. A second executioner was also supporting the Cross; another stood on a near-by rock. A sixth man, to the right, was grasping the Savior's loincloth. A seventh, only the upper part of his body visible, was throwing a rope round the Cross. An old man was awkwardly clutching the lower end of the beam in a weak effort to help. The last man, his knees almost touching the ground, was trying to pull the Cross upright. The left corner of the picture remained empty; so there he painted a prowling dog. On the Cross itself lay the Savior, the crown of thorns upon His head, the blood from the nail wound in His right palm congealing on the wrist. The whole weight of His body seemed to be supported on that right hand. Weight and muscular strain—these were the elements of the conception. The picture was a masterpiece of the art of painting, a resolution of a balance of forces, and the epic idea of a poet.

The sidepieces were not essential to the composition; their function was simply to support it from both sides. The left side demanded a quiet group, so there he placed the figures of Mary, John, and the women; the last of these, pressing her baby to her breast, seemed to be overwhelmed by the symbolic weight of the Cross. The right sidepiece asked for more dynamic qualities; he painted there a Roman officer on horseback shouting commands to the executioners, who in the background were nailing the two thieves to their crosses.

Days passed, weeks, months, and still he went on painting. Sometimes he smiled in pure enjoyment of the work. The stevedore whom he used as a model was huddled on the scaffolding naked to the waist, his huge back always turned toward Pieter. He had much trouble with his models,

for, strong men though they were, they found the poses and attitudes he demanded of them exhausting. Sometimes he thought that if he were to offer them more money they would manage to keep still longer. But he decided against doing so: his natural economy protested. So he contented himself with scolding and shouting at them. Every day he worked as long as there was light. He would go home in blissful weariness to receive his visitors who knew that he was only available for social intercourse at this hour. He allowed matters only of the utmost importance to interfere with his daily routine. One such matter was the christening of Philips's little daughter. Pieter was her godfather and Mevrouw Brant her godmother. The infant was named Clara. By this time Pieter knew that before many months passed there would be a christening in his own house. Bella was suffering badly from her pregnancy; she always felt ill, she complained of constant headaches, and her face changed alarmingly. But she was resigned to her troubles, and her eyes, though they showed black circles, shone with the happy knowledge of the child within her.

By autumn the picture was finished. After the scaffolding had been taken away so that he could receive the full effect of the picture, he cried out in his happiness. At first cautiously, and then more boldly, he began to search for faults in it, but he searched in vain. Bella was the first person he took to the Church. She stopped at the spot he indicated, gazed at the picture, and burst into tears of happiness. Pieter took her into his arms, and there she sobbed for a long time. Even when she grew calmer, she would not tear herself away.

"Aren't you tired, my angel?"

"No, no. I want to look at it for a long time. This is beauty itself. I want to drink it in for the little one's sake."

The smaller panels he painted at home. He had become accustomed to the lighting of the Church and knew exactly what colors and tones were needed. While he was at work on the side panels, the centerpiece remained covered up. The vicar and the curators wanted to display the new altar for the first time in its full splendor. They themselves had already seen the picture and could hardly find words to express their gratitude. Van der Geest had also seen it. He studied it for a long time and then clapped Pieter on the back and said: "My friend, you have joined the ranks of the very greatest. Your merits can be discussed only beside theirs."

Pieter had now more time for himself; and, as soon as he was able, he paid a visit to Brussels. The Archduke and the Archduchess received him with demonstrative kindness. They talked much of politics and particularly of the war which the murderous dagger of Ravallac had avoided. The promise of peace was renewed again. The problems of the little Duchy of Jülich had also been resolved without conflict, although in a very strange manner. The Emperor had awarded it to Catholic Saxony but had turned a blind eye when Protestant Brandenburg had occupied the debated territory; however it did not become a battlefield but remained a pawn in the diplomatic game for a long time to come. During the audience the Archduke inquired about Pieter's work; and, when he learned that he had no large commissions to occupy him at the moment, he requested him to paint portraits of his wife and himself. But the Archduchess interposed:

"If his wife is expecting a baby, do not let us take him away from her just now."

Pieter thanked them warmly for the commission and also the Archduchess for her consideration. He had grown more and more fond of that kind and wise woman, and he was anxious to serve her in every way in his power.

Back in Antwerp he now found time, together with his brother, to make a final settlement of their mother's estate. They had already erected a marble memorial to her, but her financial affairs were not yet set in order. Mevrouw Jan Rubens had died very poor, leaving nothing but her personal possessions and the old and shabby contents of the house in Klooster Straat. There was, therefore, no question of dividing the estate, but rather of sharing the responsibilities they had inherited. They had to consider two different questions. Their mother had given constant help to one or two poor people, and in their filial piety they wished to continue this charity. The second was a larger obligation: to make provision for Blandine's orphaned children. Till now they had shared the cost of the convent education of the two children, but they had made no definite provision for the future. Philips already had a little daughter, and Pieter was expecting a child of his own. They were both Flemish, precise in money matters and meticulous in carrying out their duties toward their families. When they now drew up a contract, it was natural that they should present exact accounts of their outlay. These showed that Philips

had up to now paid the larger amount. Pieter paid over the difference in cash, and signed the document dividing between him and Philips the financial responsibility for their mother's poor and their sister's children.

"*Clara pacta*," laughed Pieter.

"*Boni amici*," Philips completed the quotation.

They looked fondly at each other. Then they talked of the death of an old friend. Doctor Faber had written that Adam Elsheimer had died in Rome. Pieter said how Elsheimer had fertilized his native art—and without robbing it of its peculiar genius—with the freshness of the Italian sun, just as the painters of Antwerp, too, had benefited Flemish art.

"The tulip," remarked Pieter musingly, "is not a Flemish flower but an Indian one. But when it is planted here it becomes Flemish, though it is still a tulip."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, if I transplant a characteristic of Tintoretto into my work it becomes Flemish, but it remains art."

Thinking of these matters, he remembered Balthasar Moretus. His grandfather, old Plantin, a Frenchman, had come from Touraine to try his luck in Flanders. And nobody could be more Flemish than his descendants. Race was not only a matter of heredity, but also of geography. Men only partly inherited their character; the other part was nurtured by the landscape, the drinking water, the sun, the humidity of the air.

Balthasar, too, was brought to Pieter's mind by a recent death. The son-in-law of old Plantin, Jan Moretus, head of the printing works, had recently passed away. He had been ill for a long time; and, as both the publishing and the printing firm were being directed by Balthasar, his death came as a relief both to himself and his family. There was a great crowd at the funeral, but very little talk about the deceased. His widow, Balthasar's mother, spoke to Pieter at the funeral feast.

"I speak to you," she said in French, "because he loved you."

"I loved him too, Madame. The kindness I have received in this house is one of the most delightful of my childhood memories."

"Has Balthasar spoken to you?"

"No. We have only embraced. I didn't want to bother him. I saw how deeply he was grieved. What was it he could have said to me?"

"We have a request to make of you, Pieter. You have become a very great painter and do not undertake any small commission; but we hope

you will make an exception in our case. As you see, we have buried my poor husband in a somewhat out-of-the-way spot in a small chapel off the cloisters; but he insisted on being buried there. Would you do us the favor of painting an altarpiece in such an obscure place?"

"There is no need to ask, Madame. It will be but a poor return for the kindness of the Moretus House in publishing my brother's first book. I shall be glad to paint the picture, no matter where it is to be hung."

The widow pressed Pieter's hand gratefully, with tears in her eyes. Breughel had also a request.

"Pieter, I need your help. I would have spoken earlier, but I knew you were busy."

"I am always very busy, but never too busy for you."

"Good. Well, this is my trouble. You know of my connection with Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan. He is my most important patron and client, and he also commissions me now and then to buy pictures for him. And now his importance has been doubled: his uncle Charles Borromeo has been canonized. This will mean new work for me, for it is usual to celebrate such occasions by commissioning new pictures. I have been corresponding with the Archbishop for fourteen years, and I have never yet received a letter from him that does not chide me for my unintelligible style and scandalous spelling mistakes. I know how to paint, but I don't know Italian. What am I to do? I couldn't learn it even during my stay in Italy. I have absolutely no talent for languages. Now I have decided not to write to the Archbishop in person, but to employ a scribe instead. It can't cost so much. When I was recently in Brussels, Salinas told me that I wouldn't have to look far for such a man, as you were one of the best stylists he has met. Well, there you are. I'm quite tired out. It's a long time since I've talked at such length."

"One sentence would have been enough, old fellow. Come and see me after sunset and we'll write the letter."

When Breughel arrived, he wanted Pieter to write the letter sentence by sentence, but Pieter insisted on knowing the complete contents before he set to work. And at last Breughel agreed. His manner of speaking Flemish was colorful; his short sentences full of fine old peasant words and similes; indeed, he spoke as his father had painted; his words were steeped in the tradition and culture of his native land. But, as soon as he tried to speak Italian, he was lost. Even Latin he spoke badly. As he sat

there, his huge hands on his knees, Pieter fondly saw in him the descendant of peasants born and bred on that farm near Breda, a man in whom two generations of city life had failed to destroy the inborn rugged peasant characteristics. He was now a famous landscape painter and in high favor at Court, but Pieter reflected that he himself had achieved at least equal distinction in less than two years after his return from Italy. For he had considerable influence among court dignitaries to buttress his merits as an artist. There was no question of his being superior to Breughel, for Jan Breughel was an exceptional artist. But talent in itself was not enough for success. He recognized this frankly when he compared himself with Breughel. Jan was certainly not his inferior as an artist. A painter was not only an artist, however; he was a human being, a struggling citizen and perhaps the father of a family, anxious to provide for his children; and, even if posterity was likely to do him justice, he saw no reason for not attempting to make the best of the present. He was so absorbed by this train of thought that he mentioned the matter to Bella.

"I'm surprised that you brood so much on these things," she said. "What exactly is it that disquiets you?"

"It's difficult to put into words. . . . Perhaps it's nothing disquieting really. . . . I was just wondering why I'm slowly becoming more successful than Breughel. . . ."

"Probably because people like your work better."

"They like it better . . . but *is* it better?"

"I don't follow you. If it weren't better, they wouldn't like it better."

Pieter was on the verge of explaining that popularity was not always a final standard of artistic value. But then he remembered that, although Bella was a most intelligent woman, she was no artist herself. So he suppressed his answer and took her arm. They were walking home together through the September evening.

"I'm sure you're right," he said. "Do you feel cold?"

"No, thank you, dear. When did you last see Backaert?"

"I'm going to see the good doctor tomorrow. Everything's progressing splendidly. I'm longing to live in our own house. . . . What is it you want to say? I can feel you hesitating. Come on now—no secrets!"

"Look, Pieter, you know quite well that I trust myself to you completely; I've no will of my own because I prefer that. But now I have a request to make about this house. . . ."

"My sweetheart, why didn't you tell me before? I begin to suspect that what you want to tell me has been in your mind for some time. Let's hear it."

"Well, to be frank: I didn't speak until now because I was afraid that I would upset your financial plans, and I know that you are not only a fine painter but a very good businessman. But can you say when you are likely to come to an agreement with Backaert?"

"I don't know. I am pressing him as hard as possible. We have an option, so there's no risk. But I want to force down the purchase price as far as possible. He started at twelve thousand—now we have got down to nine. But tell me your wish, dear."

"It's simple, Pieter. The baby will come in March. It's the end of September now. I'd like my baby to be born in our own house. Perhaps that is childish. Some people might say that I should be glad to bear my first child in my mother's house and have her experienced help. But still I would like it to be in our own house. I can't explain it, Pieter. I don't want to impose on you. . . . I just want to ask if you could buy the house soon, so that I could bring my child into the world there."

Pieter put his arm round his wife's shoulders.

"Of course, my darling. It shall be as you wish."

The long-drawn bargaining did not finish until the New Year; the contract was signed on the fourth of January. Pieter Paul Rubens purchased the freehold property of Andries Backaert and his wife, Magdalena Thys, for the sum of seven thousand six hundred guilders, half of the purchase price being paid at once, the rest in yearly instalments.

They moved their effects to the new house gradually; the Brants helped them, and for a fortnight all four divided their time between the two houses. Finally the day came when Pieter and Bella slept for the first time in their new and, as they hoped, permanent home. Bella had grown rather heavy and awkward; she spent more time in bed than out of it. Pieter took upon himself the task of furnishing the house; he was everywhere, thought of everything; moving the heavy furniture himself, hanging up the pictures; his voice was heard in every room, and he would not allow his wife even into the kitchen.

"You are a wonderful man, Pieter," the young wife said when they were left alone on the first evening. "Even as a housewife you'd be more

efficient than I am. You have so much understanding for everyday things that I wonder you are an artist at all."

"You forget something, dear," Pieter replied, folding his suit carefully as he undressed. "Art is identical with real life. To live beautifully is called happiness. To present real life beautifully is called art. . . . How do you feel now?"

She gave him a reassuring answer, but her voice showed that she was trying to spare him. Other women bore the first half of their pregnancy badly, but the second half much more easily. Bella suffered all the time; her face aged surprisingly. But, if she glanced at her husband, her smile expressed such happiness that it disarmed all his anxiety.

The child arrived exactly when they expected, but it almost cost its mother her life. Bella suffered for two whole days while Pieter stamped through the rooms, pale, biting his lips, cursing nature, which did not permit man to have any part in woman's ordeal. After the baby girl was born, the midwife told him that his wife's condition was serious. He looked at the small thin baby and was alarmed to feel that he did not love it; he felt an instinctive anger against it for the danger into which it had brought its mother. He sat in deep distress by Bella's bed and watched her breathing. Of the family only Philips could give him comfort. He sent for three different doctors.

It was a week before the physicians could tell him that the danger was past and that Bella would live. By that time he had forgiven the child. There was a great deal of pity in that forgiveness, for the baby was fragile and did not seem fit to live. Its face was red, wrinkled, not at all like the plump little *putti* whose fat, healthy bodies he liked so much to paint. The godfather was Philips, the godmother Mevrouw Brant, and the child was christened Clara Serena.

Spring came with the budding of the trees and sunshine above the Wapper; the young mother sat with her child in the garden. Pieter tried to hide his grief when he looked at her: Bella had aged startlingly. She was only nineteen but looked thirty. Some peculiar ailment must have been dormant in her, but Pieter questioned the doctors in vain; they told him that there was nothing really wrong with Bella.

"You cannot love me any more," she said when her husband took her into his arms. "I have grown so ugly."

"Don't talk such nonsense, or I'll be really angry. For me you are the most beautiful woman in the world."

He tried to brighten her life with every attention. He brought her flowers and small gifts; a hundred times a day he ran from the studio to see whether she needed anything. Bella had little time to herself, for the baby was constantly ill. Some days it seemed better, but then there was a relapse. It was like this for a long time before Pieter could think of going to Brussels to paint the portraits of the Archduke and the Archduchess. Before he left he made arrangements to have news sent daily of his wife and his child.

His meeting with the Archduke and the Archduchess was different this time. The Archduke seemed to be oppressed by some hidden worry. He spoke little and obviously with the simple intention of showing that he still held his favorite in the same high regard. For the portrait he sat on a balcony against a dark background, so that his ruff showed whitely, emphasizing the pallor of his Hapsburg face. In the distant background a river bank bordered with houses could be seen. The portrait was quickly finished, and then it was the turn of the Archduchess. When she appeared for the first sitting, she saw that something was worrying the painter. Pieter spoke of his domestic troubles, adding that he received reassuring news every day from Antwerp.

"You mustn't paint now," said the Infanta, rising to her feet at once. "I, too, am in no mood for a sitting. Go home at once and don't come back until you are quite happy about the health of your wife and baby."

Pieter kissed her hand in silent gratitude and returned to Antwerp. He found that the child had again taken a turn for the worse, though no one was able to say with any certainty what ailed it. It was able to take little food and seemed to be wasting away almost perceptibly. And yet it clung to life.

One morning a messenger came with the startling news that Philips was very ill. The brothers had not seen each other for three days, for Philips had sent word that he was indisposed and would stay quietly at home. Pieter at once hurried to him. He was horrified by the change in his brother: Philips's face was drawn and pale, his eyes shone with fever, his breathing was irregular and troubled.

"Philips," Pieter cried, "whatever's the matter with you?"

"Maria will tell you," the sick man whispered. "It's difficult for me to talk."

Maria sat nursing her eighteen-months-old baby; she was again near to her time. She told him in short broken sentences that Philips had complained of severe pains in his stomach, and on the right side of his abdomen, and he screamed when the spot was touched. At first he had thought it was merely a colic brought on by eating too much fruit. But the pain became more and more violent, and last night he had not slept at all, screaming and groaning in agony. Yet he had refused to allow his brother to be sent for. But Maria had finally summoned him on her own responsibility.

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"Of course. He ordered a hot brick to be placed on his stomach and he bled him. He is coming again today."

Pieter sat down cautiously on the edge of the bed, so that his movements might not cause pain to the sick man. He took his right hand. Philips managed to smile.

"Don't worry, Pieter. I'm not going to die yet. I've still plenty to write."

"Don't talk such nonsense. Who is thinking of your dying? Wouldn't you like to eat or drink something? Nature is wiser than we or the doctors."

Philips shook his head weakly.

"He is always thirsty," said Maria, trembling.

Pieter asked whether Philips would like him to talk. Philips shook his head, but he wouldn't let his hand go. Sometimes he glanced at his wife and his child and a little smile flitted over his face. About an hour later he asked how Pieter's little daughter was. And then he did not speak for a long time. Pieter sat with him until noon and then went home to get something to eat. He returned along with Bella. In the meantime the doctor had called, but had had nothing new to say and did not think a second bleeding necessary. After an hour Bella returned to her child, but Pieter stayed on till the evening. Philips's condition did not change.

Pieter returned again to Philips's bedside after he had seen Bella and the child settled for the night.

"He is asleep," whispered Maria when he entered the room.

Her eyes were red with weeping. Around the bed sat her father and mother, the Brants and little Clara, Bella's sister.

"Any news?" Pieter asked in a whisper.

"The priest has been," said Maria and burst into tears. "Philips was unable to confess, but he has been absolved and given the last sacrament."

The sick man woke at her low whisper; his hand twitched as it lay on the counterpane. He was hardly recognizable; his features were emaciated, his nose sharp. He glanced at his child asleep in its mother's lap and then at Pieter. Then followed a scarcely audible rattle in his throat, and his eyes glazed. Maria screamed, put down the child, and lifted Philips's hand from the coverlet. It fell back lifelessly. She shook the corpse with all her strength, shouting Philips's name. But Pieter drew her away. He turned to his father-in-law and said, amazed at the calmness of his own voice:

"You all stay here. I must go home and tell Bella. Then I'll come back."

He bent over the dead man and closed his eyes. He touched the cold forehead with his lips; and, while the Brants were trying to calm poor Maria, he left the room. His feet seemed to drag on the stones, and a voice within him cried out: I mustn't think now; I mustn't think now.

He reached home in a daze, still repeating the same phrase, but now aloud for anyone to hear. He made his way to the bedroom. Bella was deep in sleep, and she did not wake when he entered. He went to the cradle, dimly aware that the sight of his child would bring some consolation. He drew back the coverings, but he saw the crippled legs as if for the first time. He gave a start of pure surprise. He realized that he had been deluding himself with the hope that the child would grow up strong and healthy. It was a cripple and would always be a cripple. The child woke and began to cry loudly. Bella woke, too.

"What is it?" she said, half asleep.

"This child is a cripple," said Pieter, his voice frozen with horror.

"I have known it for a long time," she sobbed. "I thought you knew too. . . . How is Philips?"

He staggered to the bed and sat down. His nerveless fingers stiffened and the candle fell to the floor.

II

The funeral feast was a torturing ordeal. But it could not be avoided; for, if a member of the Rubens family had gone to his grave without the observance of that custom, there would have been gossip for weeks. Pieter loitered among the guests, repeating over and over again the same phrase of thanks in return for their condolences. As soon as the feast was over, he went home, gave the apprentices a holiday for the rest of the day, and locked himself in his room so as to be alone. Bella was prostrate with grief and had gone to bed.

As the days passed, Pieter slowly returned to his daily routine. Once he looked in the mirror and saw the traces of the double blow in his face. There were hard lines about his mouth, and new creases had appeared on his forehead. Bella's behavior still worried him. If she got up and moved about the house for a few hours, he saw that her lips were tightly compressed like those of one keeping some bitter secret. At first he did not want to intrude on her suffering, thinking this merely a sign of her grief, but after a while he began to suspect that something else was troubling her. One night, after they had gone to bed, he took her hand and asked:

"Tell me, Bella, what are you keeping from me?"

He saw in the dim candlelight that her eyes had filled with tears. But she did not speak.

"I know you're incapable of lying, Bella, and that you will tell me frankly what worries you. There must be nothing I don't know of between us."

"I am not suffering because of the baby only. . . . I'm afraid you don't love me."

"Why shouldn't I love you, my darling?"

"Because sooner or later my continuous illness will become a burden to you. I see other women bursting with health. They are never ill and always pretty. I know you are good-hearted and you wouldn't leave me to bear my misery alone. But what can you love about me, a fading

woman with a sick body who cannot even bear you a healthy child? That's what troubles me always; I have no rest from it day or night."

Pieter pressed her closely to him and said:

"My darling, you mustn't speak of passing troubles as if they would last for ever. Other women ail sometimes, too, but they become fresh, beautiful, and desirable again. Other women's children aren't always perfect; but often they bear a second child as strong and healthy as the infant Hercules. God is testing our faith and patience. Let us be worthy of that test. You must believe in the future; the sun will shine again, and perhaps our child will get well."

"How kind and wise you are! But this isn't a matter of reason, Pieter. How can reason convince a woman who has lost her faith in her own body?"

"Yes. I can see that. But why should you lose your faith? You know you're a very pretty woman, even if you do look poorly now. A passing indisposition is no reason for such alarm. What kind of a husband would I be if I were to desert you just because you're sometimes unwell? Am I such a scoundrel as that? Bella, Bella, you seem to have little faith in my love for you. And no matter how deformed the child may be, it is still ours."

His words had some effect. Bella began to defend herself.

"Pieter, my dear one, I couldn't bear it if I have hurt you. . . ."

"Then don't torture yourself any more with such nonsense. Believe me, I love you very much. And I still find you very attractive."

"But if you find me attractive, why have you never thought of using me as your model?"

Pieter was at a loss for an answer. Now he realized that Bella did not live in his heart as a beautiful woman, but as an excellent and charming wife.

"How do you know I didn't think of it?" he lied glibly. "I have an important place for you in one of my next pictures."

"You are only saying that to comfort me."

"Oh, don't be so doubtful of yourself and me. You will see that I really need you. Not in the next picture because that is of men only, but the one after that. But you must wait patiently."

"I shall wait patiently enough. But what is this picture with only male portraits?"

"I have to settle a long outstanding debt to poor Philips. You know how attached he was to Lipsius, the jurist, and Van de Wouwere was also a very good friend of his. I was extremely friendly with both of them, too. The four of us have spent wonderful hours in Brussels talking of literature and art. Philips was always so clever and witty that we would listen to him for hours. What a gifted man he was! What promise he showed, what a delight he was to his friends. . . . Well, we have often spoken of my doing a portrait of the four of us. And that is the picture, my dear, for which I don't need a female model. I would need Lipsius, poor man, if he were still alive. As it is I shall have to paint him from memory, too."

Just as he was about to start work on the picture, Philips's second child was born. Pieter, as head of the family, asked Rockox to be the child's godfather, and the Mayor, who had been greatly attached to his secretary, readily agreed. The boy was christened Philips.

The painting was quickly finished. Pieter called it "The Philosophers." Lipsius seated at a table, Philips on his right, Van de Wouwere on his left, while Pieter was a little to the right in a standing position. As a fifth figure he added the bust of Seneca to symbolize the two brothers' stay in Rome and the philosophers' learned discussions.

The work was like a balm for his grief. When it was finished, he felt he had been working on it for a long time; Philips's death and his sudden loss of pride in his daughter seemed like things that had happened years ago. Bella, too, was becoming calmer. Family cares had increased, and Pieter had scant time for brooding. He now had to support not only his sister's children but those of his sister-in-law, for her parents were old and by no means wealthy. Then various new commissions turned up, and soon he was once more up to his neck in work. Both he and Bella were now resigned to the fact that Clara would remain a cripple.

He first painted the altarpiece to grace Moretus's tomb. It was a triptych; a portrait of Moretus himself—drawn from memory—in the center, John the Baptist on one side, St. Martin on the other. Balthasar, who was now the sole master of the Plantin-Moretus firm, embraced him warmly when he was shown the picture. By now he was a rich and famous publisher.

"Listen, Pieter, I have an idea which I think will please you," he said. "I am thinking of publishing a book in memory of Philips."

"That's a splendid idea. What kind of a book?"

"A symposium written by all Philips's friends who can write. I have already spoken to some of them and have collected some good ideas. Van de Wouwere is going to write an essay entitled, 'For the Consolation of P. P. Rubens.'"

"I am sure it will be good; Wouwere writes well. When you are drawing up the final plans for the volume, let me know. I'm sure I shall have one or two ideas, too."

"Of course. Frankly, I'm not publishing this book entirely for the sake of Philips's memory, but for your sake as well. We, your friends, speak often of you and wonder how we can help you best. You ought to be proud to have so many well-wishers."

The friendship and kindness from all sides touched Pieter deeply. Once again he was able to think of a future for himself which would bring him fame and great joy. Providence might see fit to restore Bella to health again, and then, perhaps, to happy motherhood. Rockox soon justified Balthasar's words about his well-wishers. And, being a noble soul, he did not seem to be conferring a favor as much as asking one.

"Pieter, don't leave me in the lurch. I have promised a painting in your name to the Archers' Guild—and without asking you first. Do me a favor and undertake it."

Pieter pressed the Mayor's hand silently, unable to find words to express his gratitude.

"So you will do it. Thank you. Come and see me tomorrow at the same time; the masters of the Archers' Guild will be here. In the meantime, you could think over the subject; you know that St. Christopher is the patron saint of the Archers. I have obtained for you the relevant volume of the *Acta Sanctorum* and you can read up all about him."

Pieter took the book home, and Bella read to him St. Christopher's life. He had a number of ideas, but none of them pleased him greatly. He was disturbed twice during the reading; once by a strange young man, a messenger from a Brussels merchant who wanted to order a picture for the chapel in his house; the second time by one of his neighbors, who inquired whether he would undertake a portrait which he intended as a gift for one of his rich kinsmen.

"You see, dear," Pieter told his wife, after accepting both commissions, "there's plenty of work. I can't do it without help. These apprentices are

ne'er-do-wells; I can't use any of them. I won't hesitate any longer but carry out the old plan I told you about. I'll take Snijders into the studio. He seems to be the most suitable man for the work."

"You always know what is best. Are you going to see Snijders one of these days?"

"Why one of these days. I'll see him now. . . . St. Christopher can rest for a while—give me my hat."

He set out at once for Korte Gasthuis Straat. Frans Snijders was one of the best painters in Antwerp—his only fault being his unpractical character. He had studied under two masters—Van Balen and Pieter Breughel—and his work was better than theirs. He had been to Italy and come back with new knowledge and inspiration. He was thirty-two and unable to make headway though, as he had recently married and needed every groat he could earn. He was a trustworthy, honest man, kind to the verge of simplicity. Yes, he would be the right man.

Snijders had married the sister of the De Vos brothers and moved into their house. Thus the three of them lived together; Paul de Vos, the painter of animals, Cornelis de Vos, the painter of battle scenes, and Snijders. They worked in the same studio and shared the expenses of the household. Pieter found the whole family at home. They hardly knew how to show their pleasure and respect; all three rushed off to get him a chair.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you. But it's after sunset. A pity I can't have a look at your work."

"Oh, sir," said Mevrouw Snijders, "all three of them are painting such lovely pictures. . . ."

"You must be happy to spend your life among them. . . . Do you mind if I have a look round?"

They rushed to bring him a lamp. There were many pictures, and he had polite praise for the two De Vos brothers, but he was chiefly interested in Snijders' pictures. And that thin, sickly man certainly had considerable talent.

"I've really come to see you, Frans," Pieter said at last, "but I suppose your brothers-in-law are also interested in your affairs."

They were all sitting in a circle in the center of the studio, which was crowded with armor, easels, weapons, caged birds, and other miscellaneous objects. His hosts showed their undisguised curiosity.

"To come to the point: I want to ask you whether you'd like to collaborate with me. Don't answer yet; I want to explain one or two things first. I need help, as I can't cope alone with my work any longer. You need commissions. I know your prices. My offer is very simple. I won't bargain with you—I'll pay your usual charges. But in future you'll be assured of steady constant work."

He got no immediate answer, for his offer had been too great and pleasant a surprise. The three men and Mevrouw Sniijders stared at him as if he were some superhuman messenger bringing them salvation. To help them over their confusion, Pieter went on:

"I'd like to develop my studio into a famous school of art. My apprentices are worthless. I can't wait until I find talented youths whom I can train for years. I need a man who is already accomplished in his art. I'll probably need several, but for the time being one ought to suffice. Take it as a sincere appreciation of your talent, Frans, that I have come to you."

Sniijders' wife cried out happily:

"Why don't you say something, Frans?"

"What can I say?" the painter mumbled. "I'm greatly honored and most happy."

"So you're willing to work with me? Thank you. You've relieved me of a great anxiety. I'm sure we'll easily agree over the details. Of course, you're entitled to work at your own commissions in my studio. As for the financial part of it, we'll have to make a separate arrangement for each occasion, as it depends on the work I give you. But I can assure you that you'll find a secure living with me."

Pieter didn't fix the day on which Sniijders should start work, but the thin, hungry-looking fellow said he would bring his easel and materials over to the studio on the following day and continue a still life he had already begun. Next morning he settled down to work and also took over from Pieter the supervision of the apprentices. By the afternoon, when Pieter set out to visit Rockox, Sniijders might have been working there all his life. The masters of the Archers' Guild had already arrived. Of course, the Guild had now only a symbolic significance, for no one lived by archery. Archers' fairs were arranged only once or twice a year, but the members clung tenaciously to their privileges and rights. They had plenty of money; and, as they were jealous of the honor of their Guild, Rockox had no difficulty in persuading them that they would be

doing themselves an honor if they had a picture painted by this artist called Rubens who had so quickly become famous.

A bargain was soon struck, but it was more difficult to decide on the subject of the picture. Each of the four members of the Archers' Committee had different ideas as to how St. Christopher should be presented. A whole hour was spent in futile discussion; at last Pieter said in a tone that suggested that the argument had lasted long enough:

"You would do me a great favor, gentlemen, if you would allow me to paint this picture in my own way. You know that an artist can only do a task well if he has a real liking for it, and I have just had an idea that I would very much like to carry out."

"I am curious to hear it," said Rockox.

"If I have rightly understood you, my task will be to paint four pictures: a triptych and one separate painting. I start from the point that the name of your patron saint is taken from a Greek word '*christophoros*' the carrier of Christ. I propose to paint four pictures, each of someone who carried Christ: first, the Holy Virgin carrying Him under her heart when she visited St. Elizabeth; secondly, old Simeon carrying Jesus in his arms; thirdly, St. Christopher carrying the Savior on his huge shoulders; and for the fourth picture I should like to paint Christ's body being taken from the Cross by his followers. Well, gentlemen, that's what I should like to do, and I hope you will give me the opportunity of doing it."

The Archers hummed and hawed, but Rockox was enthusiastic, and soon they were won over. The price agreed upon was two thousand eight hundred guilders. The Archers also agreed that, according to the custom of the St. Luke Guild, they would present a pair of white gloves to the artist's wife when the main picture was put into position. When this last detail had been settled, one of the Archers said:

"Of course, the altar itself has to be designed, and it might be well if we heard Mynheer Rubens's opinion about that, too."

"The altar isn't ready then?" Pieter asked in some surprise.

"Of course not. This altar will be in the new chapel of the Guild House."

"Oh, gentlemen," said Pieter, laughing, "do you think we can strike a bargain about an altarpiece when the altar itself hasn't even been erected? I cannot begin work until I know what the lighting in the chapel is like."

"This happens to be the first time I have arranged for a painting for a nonexistent altar," laughed Rockox. "But in any case we have come to an agreement and I suggest we have a drink on that. Pieter, are you willing to take part in the designing of the altar?"

"Gladly. If you have chosen the architect, send him to me and we can discuss the matter. And now I must not detain you any longer."

He rose and so did the Archers, but Rockox told Pieter to stay for a moment. As soon as the four men had gone, they both burst into laughter.

"Art and the Archers," said Rockox gaily, as if announcing the title of a comedy. Then he added more seriously, "But we oughtn't to laugh at them. The fame of Antwerp in the world of art rests as much with them as with you artists."

"I realize that. I didn't laugh at them in any unkind spirit. But why did you tell me to stay?"

"Because I want to become one of your clients—not on behalf of the town this time, but in a personal capacity. Sit down, Pieter. You know that my philosophy of life and death is calm enough. I can think of my own death with a certain equanimity. . . . No, don't interrupt me; I know that I'm a healthy, active man. It isn't probable that I'll be buried tomorrow. But I am slowly getting old. So I have bought a place for my tomb in the Minorite Church. My wife, too, will rest there in time. Now you can guess what I want of you. Paint me a triptych over the tomb."

"I have known few men as kind as you," Pieter smiled. "You know that my recent sorrows have depressed me, and you want to give me work. Now that you have found out that I cannot begin the Archers' commission at once, you have simply invented this work for me."

"But I can assure you that I really. . . ."

"Believe me, I shall never forget this proof of your friendship. But I have work, so don't be afraid. If you really want that triptych, let me know and I shall gladly put aside anything else I happen to be busy on."

"All right, I will," Rockox said, blushing slightly. "But it won't do any harm if you think the matter over for a little. My patron saint is the apostle Thomas. I'd like him to be in the center panel, and my wife and myself in the two sidepieces. Frankly, I should have found it difficult to sit for you at present, as I am considerably busier than usual. I am trying to adjust the relations between the Spaniards and the Port of Antwerp. The present arrangements are unsatisfactory to both parties. I have some

plans which could bring immense additional revenue to the city. But their realization will take months of hard work."

"And yet you found time to bother about the Archers and myself. I only hope there will be an opportunity for me to prove my gratitude."

"You have it every day. By your work you bring new glory to Antwerp, and so to me."

After an affectionate farewell, Pieter hurried back to the studio. He at once went in search of Bella to inquire how she felt. They discussed some unimportant household affairs; she did not ask about his visit to the Burgomaster. But then they never made a habit of discussing matters of importance during the day; such conversation came later, when work was over. Pieter was about to go to the studio when Bella called him back.

"Will you read this letter now, Pieter? It came when you were away."

Pieter broke the seal, read the letter, and said:

"Have my things packed, my dear. Tomorrow I must go to Ghent for the day. I'll tell you in the evening what it's all about."

Nor was it any small matter. The Bishop of Ghent had written to say that a new altarpiece was needed in the Church of St. Bavo in Ghent, and he would be pleased if Mynheer would call at his palace to discuss the matter as soon as possible. Pieter felt flattered to know that his fame had spread beyond Antwerp in the three years that had passed since his return.

So next day he left for Ghent, which he had never previously visited. Bishop de Maes was a smiling, pleasant old gentleman, whose hand trembled as he talked. The hand which he offered Pieter to be kissed fell back wearily. But his brain was keen and his wit sparkling. He was obviously glad to entertain someone who knew Italy and Rome, which he had himself visited. And Pieter was content to let the old prelate ramble on. But at last the subject of Rome seemed exhausted, and the old man sighed.

"Oh, it's a long time since I had such a nice talk. It has been like medicine. But now let us speak of the purpose of your visit. Have you time to do any work for us?"

"I have, Father. And, even if I hadn't, I would find some. It is a great honor to have one's work in the Church of St. Bavo of Ghent."

"I'm glad to hear that, my son. Now go to the church, have a look at the altar, and then come back. I know a little about such matters—you

can imagine that this isn't the first painting I have ordered. Naturally, the subject of the picture must be St. Bavo."

A young priest took Pieter to the church, where he inspected the nave, the altar, and the windows. But, when he returned to the Bishop's residence, he had to wait. Old De Maes had fallen asleep; and, as he suffered from insomnia, his doctors never permitted him to be wakened if he dozed off during the day. While he waited, Pieter had a look round the palace and visited the stables. At last he was called to see the Bishop.

"I suppose," the friendly old man said, "you've already finished the picture in your head."

"Not yet, Father, as you hadn't instructed me which event of the saint's life I am to depict."

"I'd like to choose his conversion. His name was originally Allowin; he was a Count of the Netherlands. St. Amandus and the Abbot Flobert converted him during a visit to a monastery. It would give me great joy if you would paint Allowin as he arrives at the monastery with his wife—in crossing the threshold, he crossed, to my mind, the frontier of God's Realm. But if you can think of anything better, please tell me. I find that the less I shackle an artist, the better work he produces."

"That is true, Reverend Father, but I find your idea most attractive. I should like to paint a staircase to place the saint's figure in the best possible position . . . but I won't bother you with details. I'll send you my sketches as soon as I've finished them. Of course, I shall be glad to call again if you find a personal discussion necessary. . . ."

"I'll be happy to see you—I have to receive so many unpolished asses that I find a man like you a refreshing change. But now let us talk about the financial side. How much do you expect for the triptych?"

Pieter mentioned the amounts he had received recently for his paintings. The Bishop suddenly changed—he began to bargain, still with bewitching kindness and charm, almost like a child begging for a sweet. But in Pieter he found his match. Pieter repeated firmly but politely that he could not take less than the prices he was accustomed to receive.

"I am angry with you, my son," the prelate pouted. "You make a poor old man suffer. But all right, let's make it two thousand eight hundred guilders, if you insist. I have only one condition; that you should do the work as quickly as possible."

"Why is it so urgent?"

"Because I am going to die, my son. It is a sin to protest against the decisions of God, but I would like to see this altarpiece finished. If you spend too long on the work, the picture will be consecrated by my successor."

Pieter returned to Antwerp and began work at once. He had some smaller commissions, but he devoted most of his time to the picture for the Church of St. Bavo. On one of the sidepieces he depicted a group of masked horsemen, and Snijders, who was a fine painter of animals, was of great help to him. In a few weeks he had prepared two sketches, one of which he sent to the Court at Brussels, the other to the old Bishop for approval. He had long to wait for the prelate's answer, and when it came Pieter learned that the old man had been ill, but that he was enchanted by the sketch and would like to discuss it personally. He would notify Pieter when he could see him at Ghent.

So there was no need to start the commission immediately after all, and Pieter didn't mind, for he had plenty of work. The altar for the Archers' Chapel was now ready, so he could begin work on the Descent from the Cross. Life had again resumed its even tenor; he laughed again and sometimes visited his friends; he no longer wore mourning. He visited Brussels to finish the portraits of the Archduke and the Archduchess.

At one of the meetings of the Romanists, Rockox took him aside.

"Pieter, have you ever heard of Count Oliva?"

"Yes, of course. I have seen him at Brussels. Don Rodrigo Calderon-Oliva, Spanish Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. As far as I know, he is here in Antwerp on a visit to you."

"Yes, that's true. But do you know the subject of our conversations? The relations between the Spanish commercial world and Antwerp. It was difficult, but I have succeeded in getting for Antwerp some important economic concessions. The Archduke Albrecht did not dare to grant these privileges, but Count Oliva came with the Duke of Lerma's permission to act as he chose best. So Antwerp is greatly indebted to Count Oliva, and we must do what we can to retain his good will."

"Yes, I can see that."

"When he was here in Antwerp I showed him over the Town Hall. He was enchanted, and especially with the Council Chamber. And he spent at least fifteen minutes gazing at your picture. He asked me your name twice. I wanted to present you to him, but you weren't at home. When

the discussions were over I went to Brussels for the final drafting of the agreement. I suggested to him that in token of his great services to the city of Antwerp, the Council would like to make him some gift. I asked him what would please him most, and he answered, 'Give me the picture of the Three Magi.' Well, what do you say to that?"

"You must give him the picture," said Pieter, after some consideration.

"Don't you mind?"

"No. The picture has already brought me a considerable reputation in Antwerp. Let it carry my name now to the Court of Spain; perhaps there are still some people there who remember me. I can paint another for Antwerp at any time."

"Thank you. I wanted to have your opinion before I brought the matter before the Grand Council."

The meeting of the Council was arranged for the twelfth of August. Two days before an excited old man rushed into the studio. Pieter knew him: he was the greatly respected head of the Merchants' Guild.

"Sit down, sir, and rest yourself. You seem quite exhausted."

"I am not exhausted, Mynheer Rubens, I am angry. That worthless fellow Rockox wants to give the Three Magi to some Spaniard."

"Yes. I have heard that."

"And you speak of it quite calmly," cried the old merchant, thumping a packing case in his excitement. "You haven't a single word to say against this wicked scheme? It is the finest picture I have seen in all my life. We ordered it, paid for it, and it's ours. Now some fathead wants to give it away. You must go to Rockox at once and protest strongly."

"I think you have come to the wrong place, Mynheer. I am not a member of the Council, and the picture does not belong to me. How can I protest?"

"But didn't you paint it, in God's name?"

"I painted it, but you bought it. Now it is yours. Suppose you had ordered a fine sable coat and paid for it; and then, as your son was getting married, you decided to give it to him as a wedding present, what would you say if the furrier were to come to you and protest?"

The old man was somewhat taken aback, but he still remained angry.

"I'll see that this picture remains ours," he cried and hurried away without another word.

Pieter learned that the old man made a most vehement protest before

the Grand Council, but the decision went against him. It was decided that Count Oliva was to have the picture. Pieter did not go to witness the painting's removal; he was a little afraid that he might feel the pangs of separation too acutely.

One day while passing the Town Hall after a visit to Breughel's studio, he chanced to meet Count Salinas. The Archduke's courtier was apparently visiting Antwerp on some political business.

"I was meaning to call on you," he said to Pieter, shaking his hand warmly. "But I have been quite exceptionally busy. How are your affairs?"

"Thank you. I cannot complain, though some things do not go as I could wish. I am working on a huge altarpiece of which I expect a great deal. The Bishop of Ghent has also ordered an altarpiece. I sent him a sketch, and he wrote to say that we should meet to discuss it, but I have heard nothing from him since."

"You mean De Maes? Don't you know he's dead? His successor, Van der Burghe, has already been consecrated."

"Oh, the poor kind old man. I hadn't heard."

"And did you hear of the Emperor Rudolf's death?"

"Oh yes, I expressed my humble condolences to Their Highnesses."

"And have you heard of yet another death? Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga, your former master, has passed away."

Pieter was startled by the news. After Count Salinas had left, he walked home slowly, his head bowed. He told Bella the sad news. Walking up and down his room, he cried out suddenly:

"But I'm alive! And I'm going to paint my masterpiece!"

III

Every day brought some new event in the great world and in the smaller one of Antwerp. It was said that the same Galilei who had been invited to Mantua to overhaul stage machinery had invented an amazing instrument in Padua, which brought the most distant objects quite close. The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was now Matthias, brother of the deceased Rudolf. The Dutchmen who had emigrated to America had founded a city called New Amsterdam at the mouth of the Hudson river. Mary Stuart's son, James I of England, had had his mother's remains piously transferred to Westminster Abbey. Monteverdi, the conductor of the Mantuan court orchestra who had composed such strange new music, had become leader of the San Marco musicians in Venice; and there was the news nearer home. Breughel had finished his series of paintings for the Archduke, depicting the four elements. Vaenius had produced forty drawings entitled: "The story of Lara's seven children," and begun on his illustrations to Tacitus. A fire had broken out in the headquarters of the St. Luke Guild but had caused no serious damage.

Pieter was wrapped completely up in his work. He left the supervising of the apprentices and his minor commissions to Snijders; he rose at four every morning and went to bed at eight in the evening. His work, too, had its incidents, more important to him than changes of dynasties or miraculous inventions. He stumbled one day over an easel and bruised his leg; a man from Utrecht made a row because he was refused permission to watch him at work. Then six brushes vanished without a trace; some draperies had to be repainted; a drunken model demanded more money. His last thought at night, his first idea in the morning, was the great altarpiece.

One September day as he was washing his hands, Bella asked him:

"How is the work going?"

"It is ready. I finished the centerpiece fifteen minutes ago. It must dry for a few days—I can't move it while it's wet."

"Are you glad, Pieter?" his wife asked while she offered him a towel.

"No, I'm sad. Sorry that it's finished and I have nothing to do. These weeks have given me intense happiness. My only consolation is that the two side panels have still to be done. But they won't give me as much pleasure as the main picture."

"Do you mind, dear, if I run down for a moment and have a look? I haven't looked at it for a week on purpose—I wanted to get a fresh impression. I didn't think you'd finish it so quickly."

"Oh yes, go and see it, my dear. I won't come, if you don't mind."

While Bella hurried downstairs, he changed for dinner. Both he and Bella dressed every evening, even when they had no guests. In a little while his wife returned.

"I didn't dare to stay any longer," she said in a trembling voice. "I wanted to kneel and pray in front of it."

"Do you like it?"

"I felt quite dwarfed by it. It is beyond like or dislike. You feel it is a force of nature. You can't argue about a storm or a rainbow."

"But have you really no criticism to make? I feel you ought to say something."

"About the picture? No, I really can't. Don't bother about my opinion—you must believe in yourself. I'm sure you think it is a masterpiece."

"Well, perhaps I do," Pieter laughed. "But what would you say if you were a countrywoman walking by chance into an Antwerp church and seeing this picture?"

Bella smiled. Her face was again pretty and attractive.

"I'd tell myself what a lucky woman the wife of the painter must be."

He took her into his arms and kissed her. Not with passion, but with an intimate, calm, wise affection, in which was mingled grief for their crippled child.

It was still light when Pieter went to bed, after deciding to examine the painting next morning with a severely critical eye.

When he examined it next morning, he tried to look at it as if he had never seen it before. A ladder was leaning against the Cross, and a group of men were removing the body from it in the murky evening light. The nails had already been taken from the Savior's hands and feet, the crown of thorns removed from His head; together with the mocking inscription, "I.N.R.I.," they had been laid in a copper vessel at the foot of the right-hand cross. Five men were trying to lower the body to the ground

on a linen sheet which had been placed under it. Two were holding the sheet at the top and gripping the body by one arm; a man on the left was balancing on his stomach, one of his legs almost horizontal, the muscles of his back and shoulders strained. Nearer the Cross, Joseph of Arimathea was standing on a ladder, supporting the body under the armpit with one hand, while the other held on to the sheet. He was staring at the body with deep bewilderment, as if the fact of the death were still inexplicable to him. On the other side Nicodemus was preparing to receive the body. At the foot of the cross John was standing with both arms stretched toward Jesus as if eager to receive the whole weight of his adored Master's body. Mary Magdelene was beside the right foot of Christ. At her side Mary Cleophas was kneeling, watching the men with naïve wonder. On the left stood His mother, her face dulled with suffering, but an infinite gentleness in her sad eyes; her two hands were raised instinctively toward the body of her Son, as she watched it with all her soul. The center of the whole composition was that lifeless body, its head fallen to one side, its hair hanging loose, its muscles relaxed. . . .

"Am I Rubens now?" he asked himself. And he answered proudly, almost arrogantly: "Yes: no one else could have painted that." True, the composition of the upper part of the picture was reminiscent of the famous mural by Volterra. But what did that signify? Nothing. Homer wrote the first hexameters; but who could deny Vergil's greatness and originality? No, his doubts of his own genius had vanished for ever; he no longer feared the traces of some great artist's influence in his work, but recognized them as a sign of kinship.

He turned to the piles of pictures leaning against the walls of the studio, face downward. He searched patiently until he found his sketch of the Erection of the Cross. He compared it with the finished Descent, and smiled exultantly. Their effect side by side was admirable; the Erection was a static composition, and so was the Descent; together they had the solidarity of an architectural creation, quite apart from their pictorial value. Although they formed a contrast, they were in fact complementary. And he reflected that it was a pity that they would not be hung together. One was in the Church of St. Walpurga, and the other would appear above the altar of the Archers' Chapel. The world didn't belong to painters; it belonged to the wealthy. But no matter. The Descent from

the Cross was a masterpiece, and he had painted it at the age of thirty-five.

He realized that Bella had entered the studio. She had got up much earlier than was her habit. For a long time they looked at the picture together, Pieter readily answering her numerous questions. At last he took her by the shoulders and drew her toward him.

"Bella, I know you. You are thinking of something which you haven't told me."

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled, but there were tears in her eyes.

"It has nothing to do with the picture. It's me."

"Come, tell me."

"Pieter, you once promised that you would use me as a model. Here is a big picture; there are three women on it, and I am not among them. I was secretly hoping that you would choose me as the Mary Magdelene."

Pieter took her in his arms.

"You're a silly and impatient creature. You might have spared yourself these tears. You wouldn't have made a suitable Mary Magdelene. I needed someone with golden hair—on account of the color scheme. See how it contrasts with the darker complexion of John. If you half close your eyes, you will see too that the disposition of the light passes in a long diagonal from the right upper to the left lower corner."

"Yes, I can see that," she said.

"Now come over here and look at my sketch of the Erection of the Cross. There is a similar diagonal of light, but this time in the opposite direction. So now you will understand why Mary had to have golden hair. But I do want to paint you as Mary—in another picture."

"Really, Pieter?"

"Yes, in the side panel, when she visits St. Elizabeth."

"Pieter, you are the kindest man in the world, and I apologize."

He stroked her face. A few moments later he left for his morning ride. As his horse trotted slowly toward the Scheldt, he fell to thinking of Mary Magdelene. He had not used a model for her; he had simply used an unrepentant courtesan to portray a repentant one—Erica. He had not even changed the color of her dress; for once Erica had visited him in just such a garment. What a difference there was between Erica and Bella; it was almost an insult to his wife to mention them both in the

same breath. Erica was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, but also one of the most debased. Bella was noble, self-sacrificing, kind. He owed eternal gratitude to God for having given him such a woman as his life's companion. She had borne him a crippled child, but could any woman be blamed for that? There was a breeze coming from the Scheldt, the sweet September sun was shining brightly, the horse beneath him broke into a brisk canter. He thought of his new picture and his wife and wished he could tell the sky how good it was to be alive.

Later he invited a few intimate friends to see the picture. Rockox came first and was enchanted. So were Breughel, Van de Wouwere, and the other painters. Cornelis van der Geest, in whose opinion Pieter was especially interested, praised it greatly, although he doubted the accuracy of the drawing of the right leg. Pieter checked it against the model; this time Van der Geest was mistaken.

Balthasar also came to inspect the picture, less as a connoisseur than as a businessman. He had a fondness for publishing books of etchings. He thought the painting wonderful and asked whether an etching could not be prepared from it.

"We cannot speak of that till the picture has been consecrated," replied Pieter. "The Archers would be rightly annoyed."

"In that case, try to think of some of your other pictures that might be suitable—that is, if you like the idea."

"Of course I do. And, as it happens, I have some time on my hands now. The Archers' Chapel isn't finished yet, and there is no need for me to push on with the sidepieces immediately. But I won't give a definite answer just now. I'll think the matter over till tomorrow and come and see you in the evening."

That evening he spent rummaging among certain sketches he had made of the palaces of Genoa when he had spent that summer in Sampierdarena. He took them with him when he called on Balthasar.

"Have a look at these, Balthasar. A very nice volume could be made out of them with the title, *Palazzi di Genova*. The material is so rich that half the drawings could be published first as an experiment. There might be a short preface. It would be a profitable proposition, for all the members of the Romanist Society would be certain to buy a copy."

Balthasar looked through the drawings and didn't reply at once. He rang a bell.

"Send in Mynheer Rijkmans."

A tall man with a stoop entered.

"Allow me to introduce you to Mynheer Rijkmans, Pieter. He is one of our best engravers. I have asked him to come here specially to see you." He turned to Rijkmans. "Will you please show Mynheer Rubens some of your work?"

Pieter looked through the portfolio of etchings and found them excellent. In half an hour the three of them had drawn up a contract. Balthasar undertook to publish the volume as soon as the complete material was available. Pieter went home and set to work; he liked his new commission so much that, although he had several others, he decided to devote some time to it every day. News of the forthcoming book soon spread. A Jesuit priest called on him. Father Aguilon apparently wanted two things, although it took him some time to explain the nature of his visit. First he wanted illustrations for his new book on optics, which was being set up in the Moretus printing shop. He next let out that the Jesuits were about to build a new church and that he, being something of an architect, had been commissioned to draw up the plans. These were ready, but he would feel honored if Mynheer Rubens would look over the drawings of the façade. Pieter was glad to undertake both tasks. He soon finished the drawings for the book, and a few days later the Jesuit General asked him to call to discuss the church plans. For two and a half hours he worked with the General and Father Aguilon, and they were both greatly pleased with the result of his labors.

"From Rubens," remarked the General, "we can only expect beauty. But I cannot understand why you do not come to us for confession."

"I am afraid your church is too far from my house. So, as I am very busy, I go to the Dominicans."

"Then it is all the more praiseworthy of you to have given us so much of your time and to provide our new church with such a fine façade."

In between his well-paid commissions he often undertook such unpaid work, for he preferred to work for nothing rather than cheaply. If someone came to him about a portrait or an altarpiece and tried to force down his price, he always said:

"I am sorry, I have so much work that I cannot undertake the com-

mission for any figure below my usual price. But explain to me exactly what you want, and I will tell who is best qualified to execute it. I should be glad to make the necessary arrangements with the artist."

He usually succeeding in persuading such clients to follow his advice. Thus it became known that to order a picture from him was a luxury, and, on the other hand, that he was a generous colleague anxious to assist his brother artists whenever he could.

It was about this time that Rockox confided a secret to him.

"Early in July the presidency of the Romanist Society will fall vacant," he said. "Many members are anxious to elect you, but of course we should first like to know whether your work would permit you to accept the honor. If so, I have no doubt that your election would be unanimous."

"I should be very glad. Perhaps I should be able to be of service to young artists setting out for Italy by arranging traveling scholarships and obtaining letters of introduction. Then, again, I cannot forget that my father was a Romanist."

As soon as Rockox had left, Pieter began to reflect how he could repay such a great mark of distinction. And, when the day of election came, he took with him two pictures carefully wrapped up. He was elected unanimously, and thanked the Romanists in a polished oration, concluding with these words:

"As a small token of my gratitude for the honor you have conferred upon me, I have invoked the patron saints of the Romanists, who also happen to be my own: St. Peter and St. Paul. I therefore ask you to accept these two paintings of them to hang in our meeting place."

When the pictures were placed on the table, everybody crowded round to see them. Pieter took the chair, and there was silence when it was seen that he wished to speak. He presided over the discussions with consummate skill, and it was soon clear that he would make an admirable president. When the meeting was ended, his father-in-law went up to him and embraced him.

"Pieter, you ought to have been a politician. I have always said that you have chosen the wrong career."

"I confess I have given much thought to politics," replied Pieter.

Jan Brant patted him on the shoulder.

"Just remain what you are. This is the man I want to see at Bella's side. Oh, if only your little girl would grow really well. . . ."

He turned away. Pieter excused himself from attending the banquet which followed the meeting, saying that no feast was important enough for him to break the routine he always followed. He asked Rockox to deputize for him. Next morning he would be up at four to start on the picture of Mary's visit to St. Elizabeth.

But Bella suffered another disappointment. The Archers, who had overwhelmed him with gratitude over the centerpiece of their altar, asked him to undertake next not the left but the right wing of the altarpiece—that depicting Simeon holding the infant Jesus—as a special mark of regard to the oldest member of the Guild whose name also happened to be Simeon. Pieter had to agree and told Bella that once more she would have to be patient.

“As you have waited so long, my angel, have a little more patience. To compensate you for this delay, I'll take you tomorrow to the circus. Snijders was there today and he came back all flushed with excitement.”

And next day they did go to the circus. The showman had pitched his tent not far from their house, and they found it surrounded by a crowd of children excitedly looking through holes in the canvas. Pieter paid the entrance fee of a few stuivers to a woman dressed in a soldier's coat, and they stepped into the tent. A number of cages on wheels drawn up in the form of a square confronted them. The largest contained lions. The trainer was leaning against a rail which ran in front of the cages. He was a small man with a bushy mustache, a handsome but forbidding face, bright eyes, and greasy hair. When Pieter addressed him, he answered in broken German: he was apparently a Moldavian who spoke Albanian, Russian, Greek, and only a little Flemish.

“Is there going to be some kind of a performance?” Pieter asked. “I'd like to see the lions in movement.”

“There will be when there are more people here, sir,” the man replied. “It isn't worth while when there are so few.”

So Pieter and Bella walked from cage to cage. They saw a wicked and bored-looking camel, a zebra, a wolf which had retreated to the farthest corner of its cage, a small jaguar pacing up and down restlessly, a baboon with a wrinkled sky-blue nose. On a perch a parrot was swearing in some Slavonic language. But Pieter was interested only in the lions. He went over to the trainer again and gave him a few silver coins; whereupon the performance started at once. The man entered the cage,

an old pistol in one hand, a whip and an iron bar in the other. He began to shout loudly in the same Slavonic language as the parrot. One of the lions, the female, took no notice of him, but the male got up slowly. The trainer shouted still more loudly and began prodding the lioness with the iron bar, whereupon she snarled viciously. Pieter took Bella by the arm.

"Did you notice its mouth?" he asked.

The performance consisted in mock attacks by the lions on a wooden stool held in the trainer's left hand; then, amidst great shouts from him, they jumped clumsily through an iron hoop. The keeper prodded the beasts until they roared; he fired his pistol into the air, jumped nimbly from the cage, and appeared among the spectators holding a tin plate.

"The male lion didn't show his teeth," said Pieter. "I'd like him to."

It was difficult to make the trainer understand what he wanted, and when he tried dumb show the man still shook his head uncomprehendingly. At length the woman in the soldier's jacket, who spoke excellent German, was sent for. Pieter explained that he would like to have the lion's mouth kept open as long as possible; he was a painter and wanted to draw it. After his request had been interpreted to the trainer, it was at length decided that the lion should be brought to the studio early on Friday morning. The circus was moving on that day, so the lion could be spared as long as Pieter desired. It would be an easy matter to keep the beast's mouth open, for if he was tickled under the jaw he yawned, and this could be repeated indefinitely.

Pieter gave the trainer a guilder as a token of good faith and said he would come himself for the lion on Friday morning. Bella remained silent during the conversation, although she was visibly nervous. When they were outside, she said:

"I hope you were only joking, Pieter."

It took him no more than a moment to decide to lie.

"Of course, I was joking," he said.

But when he got back he drew Snijders aside and told him to come early on Friday as a live lion was to be brought to the studio by its trainer; but on no account was he to breathe a word about it to Bella. Then he worked at his picture of old Simeon lifting up the infant Jesus in the temple and saying, "*Nunc dimittis, Domine, servum tuum.*"

It was a fine subject, and Pieter was glad that he had thought of it. According to Scriptures the prophecy had been that old Simeon would

not die until he had beheld the Messiah. And he had chanced to be in the Temple just when the infant Jesus was being presented there, as was the Jewish custom. The old man had at once recognized the Messiah and taken the child into his arms with reverent joy. He knew that the promise had been fulfilled and that when he left the Temple he would die peacefully. Yet he was content and he prayed, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace. . . . For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." The scene fired Pieter's imagination. The whole composition strained upward, the upward movement being emphasized by the tall vertical columns of the temple. He painted the child with loving care. So much, indeed, did he want a healthy child of his own that he introduced children into every picture where he could.

On Friday morning Pieter rose at the usual time and rode to the circus. The trainer and his wife were waiting for him.

"Well, how are we going to move him?" Pieter asked.

"We shall drive the cage into your courtyard and then coax the lion into your studio," replied the man.

Two horses were harnessed to the cage containing the lion. The trainer and his wife sat on the box while Pieter rode ahead to show the way. Snijders was waiting at the gate, and the cage rumbled into the courtyard. Pieter hurried into the apprentices' room, which was next to the studio, woke one of the apprentices, and said:

"Go to your mistress's room and sit in front of the door. If she wakes and wants to come down, you are to tell her that I have strictly forbidden her to leave her room."

He then hurried back to the courtyard. The cage had been dragged close to the studio door. The trainer prodded the lion; the lion got up and walked slowly out of the cage into the studio. Pieter and Snijders were waiting for it with sketchbooks and red chalk. In the center of the room a large quantity of horseflesh in a tub was waiting for their unusual guest. The lion soon found the meat, sniffed it, seized a large piece, dragged it off to a corner, lay down, and began to eat.

"Splendid," said Pieter, sketching rapidly.

"This is certainly a rare opportunity," answered Snijders in a rather tremulous voice.

"Surely you aren't afraid, Frans?"

"I prefer him to eat horseflesh rather than me."

Nothing broke the silence but the noise of the lion feeding and the rustle of paper being changed every time Pieter started a new sketch. Of all animals the lion interested him most, and he took intense delight in drawing the magnificent beast. The big chunk of meat was soon finished; the lion returned to the tub and snatched another piece with a low growl. Pieter and Snijders went on working feverishly. Twice more the beast returned to the tub, and then, after assuring himself that the feast was over, lay down.

"Now let's see that yawn," said Pieter to the woman, who explained what he wanted to her husband.

The trainer went to the animal and prodded him. The lion gave a growl, angry at being disturbed after his feast. But at last he got up. The Moldavian scratched his neck for a long time without result. At last the lion opened his mouth in a huge yawn, turning toward Pieter.

"Wonderful," he cried. "More, more. As often as you can."

The beast lay down again, but the trainer succeeded once or twice more in making him yawn. Pieter drew closer and urged the man to greater efforts. But suddenly the trainer held out the iron bar before him and began to shout loudly. The lion was stretching his paws toward the bar, playfully but none too gently. His tail thumped up and down, and suddenly he roared like thunder. Snijders by this time had retired to the farthest corner of the studio; Pieter rose from his stool, but he still went on working.

"Be careful, Mynheer," said the trainer's wife. "There may be trouble."

"Come here and take your money," he said, holding out two gold pieces he had ready.

The trainer was shouting with all his might and lashing the beast's head with his whip. But the lion was far from being intimidated by such treatment. He roared till the windows shook, showing his teeth, thumping the ground with his tail; he seemed about to spring. Someone was knocking on the locked door of the studio, and Pieter heard Bella's screams. These confused the animal for a moment, and the trainer saw his chance. He beat it violently and guided it toward the courtyard entrance. The lion's tail drooped, and the trainer slammed the gate of the cage behind it.

"Ours is a difficult profession, Mynheer," said the woman to Pieter, and ran out after her husband.

Pieter opened the studio door. Bella, her face distorted with hysterical weeping, confronted him.

"My dear, didn't I tell you not to come down?"

"Even if you had told me a thousand times, what did you expect me to do when I heard that terrible roaring?"

"Don't be childish, Bella. It was a harmless, tame beast. Go back to your bed, my dear, and rest. I must compare my sketches with those Frans has made. Then I shall go for a ride. And in future please do as I tell you."

Bella left him; she was still crying and rather hurt. Sniijders appeared, a little pale with excitement, but smiling. When they compared their work, they were delighted to see how many drawings they had been able to make in the comparatively short time the lion had been in the studio.

"These will come in handy for years to come," said Pieter. "Our clients are more and more asking for hunting subjects. It might be as well if you were to make some sketches from memory of the last episode of the visit while I am out."

The story of the lion's visit to the studio soon spread through the town; Sniijders had gossiped to his wife and his brother-in-law. Rockox sent a special messenger to inquire whether Pieter had come to any harm. Pieter replied that he was perfectly well and would be obliged if the Mayor would call upon him the following day.

"I've only fifteen minutes to spare," Rockox said on arriving. "What do you want?"

"I'd like you to give me at least an hour. Look at this sketch of old Simeon holding the Infant Jesus. Behind him you see an empty space for a male head. I want to paint you there."

"Me?"

"Yes, and I'm very keen on the idea, so don't oppose it. Your office makes you head of all the guilds, including the Archers', so it is only fitting that you should appear in the picture. And if you consent I shall kill two birds with one stone, for I shall have your portrait for your tomb."

"But, my dear Pieter, I am far too busy for long sittings."

"There is no need of that. I shall simply make sketches, and when I do the actual painting I shall not need you at all."

In little more than an hour Pieter had made five or six sketches in chalk.

One evening, when they were sitting together after their work was finished, Bella said:

"Pieter, when the Simeon picture is finished, is it certain that you will paint the one of Mary?"

"Yes, my dear. I promise you there will be no more delays."

"I only asked because I think it would be better to postpone it after all."

"What do you mean?"

"And you a wise man! Can't you guess?"

Pieter looked searchingly at her face, and he understood.

"Oh, Bella, are you serious?"

"Yes, the doctor is certain; mother, too."

"I am overjoyed. When can we expect the baby, Bella?"

"About the beginning of July. So if you wait for a little longer you won't be able to find a better model than me."

From that day the house was a changed place. Pieter was in perpetual high spirits, and his happiness infected everyone. By the middle of February both the picture of Simeon and of the giant Christopher had been handed over to the Archers. The Church authorities saw them and were delighted; their only objection being that St. Christopher was too naked. They insisted that some drapery should be painted round his loins. Pieter didn't argue; it was unwise to contradict the Church. Though it upset the composition, he made the necessary alteration. He then happily set to work on the picture of Mary.

In contrast with the picture of Simeon, the composition of this picture was horizontal. Bella stood blissfully while he painted her, lowering her eyes with the melancholy happiness of a young mother-to-be; her hand rested lightly on the iron balustrade. Behind the Holy Mother he painted a pretty servant girl, using Clara, Bella's sister, as a model.

While he worked on this picture, Pieter put aside everything else. It was finished in sixteen days, and soon afterward the complete altarpiece was set up in the Archers' Chapel. A deputation from the Guild appeared at the house bringing the traditional pair of white gloves for the artist's wife. And a magnificent pair it was, richly woven with gold embroidery.

"Whenever shall I be able to wear these?" sighed Bella.

"At the consecration of the picture, my darling. The ceremony will be

on the twenty-second of July. If you are right in your calculations, you will be up and about long before then."

"But I am so afraid something will go wrong," she said.

"Don't talk such nonsense. You have only to look in the mirror to see that you are more beautiful than ever. Nature is no cheat, my angel. By the way, tomorrow I must go to Brussels. Guess why."

"I cannot imagine."

"I am going to ask the Archduke to be the little one's godfather. We shall call him Albrecht."

"And what if 'he' is a girl?"

"Impossible, it will be a boy."

The archducal pair were delighted to be the child's godparents. They talked of many things and Pieter heard some interesting news. Duke Francesco had suddenly died at Mantua, and his brother, Ferdinando, was now on the throne, having yielded his cardinal's rank to his younger brother. There was also news from Russia. Things were calmer now after the disturbed times of Boris Godunov and the pseudo Demetrius; the bishops and boyars had elected as Czar a youth of seventeen called Michael Romanov, the son of the Archbishop of Rostov. A new dynasty had thus been founded and the young Czar was said to be ruling wisely. From Paris it was learned that the Queen Maria, unable to forget the traditions of the Medici family, had embarked upon a big building program in the French capital. Her son, Louis XIII, was a precocious youth who would probably cause his mother great annoyance. From Spain had come the false rumor that El Greco had died.

"Did you ever meet him, Rubens?"

"No, Your Highness. He lived at Toledo and I never managed to get there. But I have seen some of his pictures and was frankly puzzled by them."

"Why? Didn't you consider him a good painter?"

"That is a difficult question to answer, Your Highness. He was so strange to me. But I can't deny that in those days when I was tortured by doubts of my own talent I felt disquieted when I compared my own work with his. Today he would no longer affect me in that way. Thank God, I am sure enough of my work. That's just the reason why the behavior of the new Bishop of Ghent nettles me."

"Van der Burghe? What has he done to you?"

"His predecessor, kind old De Maes, commissioned me to paint a triptych depicting the Conversion of St. Bavo. I sent copies of the sketches to Your Highness. Now the new Bishop, who hasn't even looked at the sketches, refuses to honor the contract; I've heard that he wants some statuary for the altar instead of a painting. And I feel sure that I could produce something finer than I've yet done. May I humbly beg Your Highness to remind the Bishop that contracts are made to be respected?"

"Your case is a just one. Give me the details in writing. I'll do whatever I can."

Pieter returned to Antwerp with several new commissions. He did not change his way of life: he worked from sunrise to sunset; but he interrupted his work several times during the day to visit Bella. She bore her pregnancy well; she had become prettier, and yet by some strange feminine magic looked more virginal than ever.

On the evening of July the fourth the midwife had to be summoned. Next afternoon the baby was born—an eight-pound boy, fat and healthy.

"Pieter," said Bella, while nursing the baby, "forgive me for being so fearful and dubious."

"You were dubious because you wouldn't believe me. Tell me when you change his clothes. I want to sketch him."

The christening was a most elaborate ceremony, attended by all the important Antwerp dignitaries. Jehan de Silva, the Court Councilor, representing the archducal godparents, conveyed the baby in a court carriage to church. The proud father could not refrain from bragging of the strong straight limbs of his son.

The consecration of the altarpiece, six weeks later, was an even greater ceremony. The Governor of Flanders was again represented, Rockox on one side of him, the artist and his wife on the other. When they left the church after the solemn mass, Bella walked on the arm of the court dignitary. The Spanish grandee condescended to entertain the pretty wife of Mynheer Rubens. He spoke of Brussels and court life.

"The day before yesterday we had a most horrifying experience. A circus came to Brussels and some of us went to see the animals. The trainer had two lions. The male was irritable, but the trainer seemed able to dominate it. Unfortunately he stumbled over a stool and fell. The lion jumped on him at once and tore him into pieces before our eyes. His

wife was there, too. She fainted. . . . In God's name, what is the matter, dear lady?"

"Nothing—except that I've almost fainted myself. . . ." She turned round with a pale face. Pieter was just behind her. "Did you hear that, Pieter?" she asked.

"I did. I won't do it again. But yesterday I was offered a thousand guilders for a picture of a hunting subject. I can promise you, Bella, your son will be a very rich man."

They had reached the doorway of their house. Bella crossed herself and said:

"I don't want him to be very rich—only as happy as I am. . . . I wish Clara were healthy . . . that would be worth more than any amount of money. . . ."

IV

The visit of the lion certainly turned out to have been an excellent investment. The craze for hunting pieces had never been stronger. Lesser painters did not dare to paint anything more dangerous than a wild boar; it was easy to get a stuffed one, and a boar fighting with dogs was a subject which long-dead painters had painted in a hundred variations, and one could exist on their capital. But the Antwerp painters did not dare to tackle a lion; they knew little of such outlandish beasts. Now Pieter Paul Rubens and his studio suddenly appeared on the market with an amazing knowledge of lions.

The first picture caused such a sensation that it started a regular pilgrimage to the studio. Pieter was displeased if uninvited guests or strangers called on him out of mere curiosity. In the English fashion he considered his home his castle. But slowly, as his fame increased, he realized that he could not keep up this attitude. If some stranger arrived from Utrecht or Liege and as a customer called on the most famous painter of Antwerp, it was impossible to probe into his *bona fides*. Nor was he inclined to underestimate the value of tale bearing. When these visitors returned home, they would brag of having seen the studio of the famous Rubens and having watched him at work on some wonderful masterpiece. So his house became more or less a public institution of Antwerp which any visitor had to include in his itinerary. Pieter resigned himself to the fact that his studio was no longer part of his home. He set himself to separate it from the rest of the house, installed a separate kitchen and special servants. But, when he retired at sunset to the company of Bella and the children, nothing was allowed to disturb him.

The picture of the lion hunt was a most complicated composition; he spent hours arranging it with the help of Snijders. Four horsemen, three beaters, and two lions had to be accommodated on the canvas. The idea was that some distinguished Orientals were entertaining a Roman officer of high rank at a hunt. The Orientals were armed with lances and bows, the Roman with a sword; the beaters had daggers. The hunting party

had disturbed two lions in a sloping, bushy thicket, a male and a female. One of the beaters had already been killed by them, and was lying underneath the prancing, startled horses. The lioness had jumped on a second beater, knocking him down; he was lifting his dagger to strike at her. Her fate seemed to be sealed. But her mate had not yielded so easily; he had leaped on one of the hunters and pulled him from his terrified white horse. The lion's terrible jaws were crushing the hunter's leg. But the lion was threatened; the second Oriental was thrusting his lance into his flank, the third was piercing his shoulder, while the Roman officer swung his sword down upon his head. There was fierce excitement on the faces of the Orientals, but the helmeted Roman remained calm. The whole picture was so alive with dramatic movement that those who saw it were startled.

A fashion was thus begun. One after another, rich men appeared in the studio demanding pictures of lions and hunts, and they all insisted that their pictures should not be copies of the first one. Pieter and Snijders were kept working furiously from dawn till dusk. And not on pictures of hunting scenes alone. 'The Archers' Descent from the Cross had created a considerable demand for copies, especially in clerical circles, and soon five such commissions were in hand. The Archduke and the Archduchess were demanding copies of their portraits. These were sent to Prague and to Valladolid for the Marquis Siete-Yglesias, whom they were anxious to honor.

Pieter's studio had become a factory. Early in the morning he used his fresh brain to make his plans; he would take out his big order book—which resembled that of a merchant rather than that of an artist—and map out the day's work. With astonishing rapidity he sketched a new variation of a hunting scene or thought out the details of some other work. He was unwilling to make exact copies of his paintings—partly because he had to charge less for them, partly because he liked to take the opportunity to improve upon the original, perhaps by readjusting the balance of the composition or improving the coloring. When Snijders arrived and the apprentices had been roused, the work of the studio started. The sketches were worked up into paintings. Pieter worked on five pictures at the same time, walking from one easel to another, taking the brush now from one hand, now from another, deftly correcting the mistakes of the young apprentices, improving the colors here, setting

right a prespective there. Pictures for all but purely commercial motives he worked on from beginning to end himself. There were clients he could not look upon as merely business acquaintances. Such a one, for example, was the Duke of Zweibrücken-Neuburg.

This nobleman ruled over a small part of the Rhineland. Political pressure had made it necessary for him to forsake Protestantism and become a Catholic. Like most converts he was anxious to demonstrate the reality of his conversion, and he spent large sums on endowing monasteries and building churches. This in turn gave great opportunities to the painters.

The Duke entrusted Pieter with his best commissions. Two priests arrived to ask him to paint a Nativity, but also promised five or six orders in the near future. Payment presented no problem. The Duke was acquainted with the prices demanded by the Rubens studio and was fully prepared to pay for the services of the best artist of the day. Pieter started on the picture of Nativity at once, resolved to paint it with his own hand. The Duke of Zweibrücken-Neuburg was his first foreign client, and he had no intention that he should be the last.

So it happened that eight pictures were sometimes being worked on at the same time. The congestion in the studio was indescribable; everyone got in everyone else's way; on one occasion room had actually to be found for a horse which was to appear in a picture.

"It simply won't do," Pieter complained happily one evening to Bella. "We shall have to have the house rebuilt. Tomorrow I shall send for Frans Crayer; he is said to be the best architect in Antwerp. He is also the most expensive; but the dearest things are always the cheapest in the long run. I am afraid we shall be inconvenienced for some time, my angel. The studio will overflow into the house, and we had better lodge with your parents for the time being."

"I am sure they will be glad to have us; and I shall be glad to go back to where we started life together."

"Why, were you happier then? I feel we love each other more now."

"Yes, I think so, too. But I cherish the memory of those days. . . ."

"And I shall make some alterations to the rest of the house, too."

Pieter went on enthusiastically. "I want a home fit for a king."

Next day Crayer came; he looked over the house carefully, and then he and Pieter sat down to discuss the plans. Walls had to be knocked

down to turn two rooms into one, more windows constructed, the entrance made more imposing.

"You will have a very fine house," remarked Crayer. "It is fortunate that money doesn't matter with you."

"Oh, doesn't it?" cried Pieter. "Every stuiver counts."

"Come, come, Rubens. All Antwerp knows that money is pouring into your studio."

"And do you think it doesn't pour out again? Have you forgotten that I must pay Snijders and my apprentices? Do I get paint and canvas for nothing? And what about the expense of maintaining my household? And all my relatives who look to me for assistance? I tell you I have not a stuiver to spare. I shall be happy if I can just pay for these alterations to the house."

"Don't say more, or I shall begin to pity you."

"And so you ought. I want all the building materials to be of the finest quality, but you must remember that you are working for a poor man."

Pieter talked on, but he couldn't help thinking with satisfaction of the twenty thousand guilders he had saved. At length a bargain was struck and a contract drawn up. And, when the date was added to the document, July 25, 1615, Pieter reflected that the most famous painter in Antwerp would soon have one of the finest houses in that city.

The studio expanded into the living rooms, the easels were distributed all over the place, while the furniture was stored in the attic. The house was cluttered with ladders, wheelbarrows, buckets; the courtyard became almost impassable. Pieter and the family moved temporarily to the Brant house—the same rooms where they had started their married life. Clara, Bella's young sister, was delighted with this arrangement, for she adored the two children, and now she could nurse them and play with them the whole day long. Pieter's life continued unchanged; he rose at dawn, went for a ride, attended Mass, and then returned to the house, where it was impossible to work quietly in the chaos of rebuilding. But he did not mind this, as he knew it was only temporary. He took part himself in the refashioning of his house. The house front had several areas of blank wall; these he planned to fill with his own pictures, most of them of classical subjects. He laughed when he told Snijders:

"I am certainly getting ahead, Snijders. I decorate my house with

Rubens pictures. Anyone else would have to pay a fortune for them. I dreamed that this would happen when I worked as Verhaecht's apprentice."

"Luckily you haven't learned much from him, Pieter."

"No, nothing except how to plane a piece of wood. . . . Have you any news of my first master?"

"He's getting old, and he's just as bad a painter as ever. The other day I saw a painting of his entitled: Hunting Adventures of the Emperor Maximilian. Without the explanatory title you might have thought it depicted a flunkey trying to commit suicide. Probably he painted the whole thing to show a Tyrolean scene; as far as I know he spent some time there in his youth. Not that one could learn anything from his picture of the Tyrol. . . ."

"That's interesting, Frans. We don't know the hidden nature of reality; it's a mysterious something. Painting has a wonderful quality: to be convincing. It may depend on a single stroke of the brush, a mere blob of color. But the painter usually remains ignorant of the importance of that single detail. God can do anything, even create a man. The painter is denied that privilege."

"But, if he achieved it, would he become God?"

"No, for he can only imitate God. But this is the greatest thing a man can do, after God. You can believe me, Frans, though you mustn't tell anyone, for they won't believe you; we artists rank straight after God. Not the kings, but we . . . or perhaps the kings, too—if in their governing they are able to imitate God. But in that case they, too, are artists."

"How can they imitate God in governing a country?"

"By establishing peace and good will. The Archduke, for instance, is an artist. He knows how to secure peace for Flanders, using extraordinary skill and wit. And yet he isn't a real artist, for his peace isn't perfect. He forgot to include the Scheldt in the twelve years' armistice. The Scheldt's estuary has been left out of the agreement, though it is Antwerp's life line. Half of the armistice period has expired, and where are we? In six years there will be war between Spain and the Netherlands. A bad peace can only lead to war, Frans. I shall be forty-four then, you forty-two—still in the prime of our lives. We may work for our patrons and collect some wealth for our children. But mercenaries are going to

burn the castles of our patrons, poverty will follow and barren misery. What can we do? We must work like madmen for six years, for who knows what will come after. That's why I loathe war, Frans. . . ."

Snijders was silent. He was a very shy man; his thin, fragile body hid an ardent soul, but only those who knew him well knew it. Pieter did, and read in his taciturn face a deep affection and fidelity.

Although Crayer had promised solemnly to finish his work on a set date, he was late. Pieter took the delay calmly; he had reckoned with it. He had even made arrangements for a longer one. But in the end they were able to return to their house earlier than he had promised Bella. And in its new form the house enchanted him. The front was most impressive, and after the scaffolding had been removed, crowds gathered for days to stare at the pictures let into the masonry. At one side there was a formal French garden, while the house itself was freshly painted, with a wrought-iron weather vane and metal torch holders above the eaves. The courtyard was rounded off by a balustrade with columns, the latter being decorated with eagles. The arcades bore inscriptions in Latin, which the master of the house had chosen from his beloved Juvenal.

An ornamental doorway led into the studio. This had been altered beyond recognition; it was roomier, lighter, with plenty of space; under its ceiling there were windlasses, so that huge canvasses could be raised and lowered. The living rooms had also been changed, their furniture showing a mixture of Flemish and Italian styles. Everywhere pomp and tasteful luxury: vases on onyx columns, reliefs on the walls, between the windows finely placed white marble statues—his acquisitions in Rome—and a bathroom with hot water laid on. Anybody might have called the house a palace.

Work soon started in the new studio. The Duke of Zweibrücken-Neuburg always ordered a new picture as soon as the last had been delivered. The Descent of the Holy Ghost and the Triumph of Fate had already been sent to the Rhineland. Now he commissioned two large paintings simultaneously, and gave detailed instructions. One was to depict the Fall of the Rebellious Angels, the other the Judgment Day. Pieter decided that the time had come to raise his price. He was willing to paint the Fallen Angels at the usual rates, but he told the two priestly emissaries of the Duke that the Judgment Day would cost him no less than three thousand five hundred guilders. They accepted his terms without a word, but Pieter

was not disappointed that he had not asked more—he knew it was better to go cautiously.

First he tackled the picture of the Fallen Angels but could not get ahead with it. So he put it aside and started on the Judgment Day. At first he was uncertain how to paint it: he wanted to show a multitude of figures hovering between heaven and earth, striving upward toward the heavenly throne, while others were being hurled to eternal damnation. All that he saw clearly was the calm and glorious and steadfast figure of Christ enthroned in heaven, and the two contrasted vertical powers, the struggle between which upheld the cloudy throne as on twin columns. He gave the gigantic scene a foreground and base, marked only by some figures rising from their graves. Then he had another thought and dropped his idea of a struggle balanced on two sides: he would paint a single mass of bodies rolling in space, displayed in the most diverse postures and far above, in the dim circle of glory, the Savior sitting in judgment. All should be included in that host, the angels blowing their trumpets, and the devils dragging away the damned. The devils he conceived rather as strange and curious monsters than as horrifying fiends.

These variants, the result of innumerable pencil sketches, served several purposes. First of all, to make him see clearly what was in his imagination—he could think logically only on paper or canvas. Then the representatives of his client would be able to choose the version they liked best. Sometimes patrons were vague regarding their wishes; or some rich man who had not yet thought of commissioning a picture, on seeing these sketches might decide to order one or other version of the Last Judgment.

The fame of his past work was shown by the fact that many of his customers, instead of commissioning some new work, demanded a copy of one of his pictures already finished. It was well known that he was never content to fob them off with a servile copy, which his collaborators could have turned out without his help; he always altered the original composition, experimenting, modifying it, so that in the end it was more or less a new work. Some Capuchins, for instance, arrived from Tournai to say that they wanted a copy of the picture of the Three Magi, the original of which had been presented by the city of Antwerp to Count Calderon-Oliva. A little later the city of Mechlin got in touch with Pieter asking for the same picture, but with some variations.

His commissions increased so rapidly that soon even the new studio

proved to be too small for work on such a large scale. Again he had to find some means to satisfy the new demand. He had only to draw on his Italian memories for an idea: Raphael had already thought of a way out. The picture could be painted in another studio; the original character of the Rubens' school was maintained. There were many partially unemployed painters in Antwerp. He would make clear sketches of his subjects and commission some of the best of these men to paint pictures from them. They would then deliver the pictures to him, whereupon he could make any improvements or corrections that might be necessary, or merely add the intangible something that would give them the unmistakable Rubens quality. The division of profits would follow a prearranged scheme. One of the first men to benefit by this method of working was Nicolaas, his former fellow page. He had grown up into a paunchy little man, a mediocre painter, a good craftsman, without individuality. He often reminded Pieter that he had painted his portrait in those far-off days, and wondered if it was still somewhere in the Castle.

Another kind of artist also found a place in the studio: the copper engravers. These men were sometimes unable to accommodate the picture to be copied in their own studios, and Pieter liked to be present when some particularly delicate work was afoot, such as the joining of the three sections of a triptych in one engraving. There were also engravings to be made for the book dedicated to Philips's memory, for Balthasar was keeping his word, and the volume was shortly to appear. The editorial work was undertaken by old Brant. The book consisted of sermons by St. Asterius, which Philips had discovered in manuscript in the library of Prince Colonna, Philips's Latin poems, and finally the essays written by his friends.

The book would make another fine edition to Pieter's growing library. He had brought back many volumes from Italy; he had bought the pick of Philips's own collection; while he had acquired in addition many splendidly illustrated books on natural science. After the day's work was over, he usually found an hour to look through his latest acquisitions, or immerse himself in the pages of Juvenal or some other classical author. Bella would sit beside him reading or doing her needlework; little Clara would play quietly in her chair, while the nurse kept Albrecht amused. And Pieter would have found it difficult to say which hours of the day

delighted him most: those spent in the quiet intimacy of the family circle, or those passed hard at work in the studio.

But while his life as a family man seldom brought him into exciting contact with the outside world, his life as an artist did. Pieter and Bella had reduced entertaining to the minimum, and they seldom accepted invitations. The studio, on the other hand, was often visited by strangers from distant places, and those from France interested him most; perhaps because he had never visited Paris, perhaps because the sister of the Duchess of Mantua, his former mistress, had become the French Queen. From these visitors he learned that it was now the fashion in Paris for gentlemen to wear their hair long, so that it reached their shoulders. This, however, was considered such an uncomfortable fashion that many gentlemen wore wigs. Pieter was not particularly interested in trifles of that kind. All political news, however, was assured of his liveliest attention. He knew that Maria Medici, who was acting as Regent until her son's coming of age, was reorientating the foreign policy of her country, turning toward Spain and away from England. She had a bosom friend in the person of Eleonora Galigai, whose husband, Concini, was the all-powerful adviser to the throne, and the Queen, in an effort to Gallicize him, had given him the title of the Marshal D'Ancre. However, an opposition faction was growing which centered its hopes in the boy who would one day be King Louis XIII. This party was led by none other than the young Duke of Condé, who had so recently returned to Paris from Brussels, whither he had fled because of the interest the late French King had shown in his child wife. Relations between the two factions were acrimonious, and the Parisians daily expected the Duke of Condé to raise an army and march against Concini and his supporters.

"And what are the chances?" Pieter asked his French visitor.

"According to popular opinion, the King's party will triumph. There's a superstition that he's bound to win, for thirteen is a lucky number. His name, Louis le treize, consists of thirteen letters; he is the thirteenth Louis among the kings of France; he married at the age of thirteen; his wife's name, Anne d'Autriche, also consists of thirteen letters, she, too, was thirteen at her marriage and born in the same month as her husband, and she also is the thirteenth member of the Hapsburg dynasty to be called Anne. In view of all this people firmly believe that his reign will

be attended by luck, and that the greatest of all French kings will be born from this union."

"This is very amusing, monsieur, but only a superstition. What are the true facts of the situation?"

"Who can prophesy in politics? The Queen Mother is vain and ambitious; Concini is robbing the Exchequer with unparalleled audacity and wields enormous power on account of his wealth. On the other hand, the Duke of Condé has good hopes when Louis attains his majority—even supposing he does not take action before—for the boy King cordially dislikes his mother and detests Concini."

The French gentleman did not order a picture; he had visited the studio merely out of curiosity, for Pieter's fame had already reached Paris. It had also reached Milan. One day Breughel called at the studio with the news that he had brought a commission from that city.

"This is very handsome of you. But why don't you paint the picture yourself?" asked Pieter in surprise.

"I have painted a whole gallery for this particular client—you know that very well, for you write my letters to him. It is the Archbishop Borromeo. He now writes to say that he has heard such great things of you that I must obtain a picture of yours for him at any price. You can imagine how glad I am to be able to show my gratitude to you by this small service."

"Have you brought the letter with you?"

"Yes, and you will have to write the answer. There will be no need to bargain about the price. The Archbishop knows that you charge six hundred guilders for a small picture."

Pieter read the letter. His Eminence wanted a picture with an idyllic subject, something light and airy, and above all something the artist himself would take pleasure in painting.

"I accept the commission, old fellow. I'll write to the Archbishop in your name."

Next morning, after Mass was over he sketched the picture: seven little *putti* carrying a profusion of fruit. It became a charming painting and one in which Pieter took enormous delight. The dimpled, nude bodies of the children were arranged in such a way that they themselves formed a garland; four of them were painted complete, while behind the mass of fruit three more heads were visible. The whole household was

sent in search of the most attractive children in Antwerp. A regular pilgrimage began to the house on Wappersvaart; mothers arrived in droves with their beautiful or allegedly beautiful offspring, excited by the possibility that Rubens himself would paint their children. Bella seldom visited the studio; Pieter liked her to keep away. But this time she could not be kept away—she was too fond of children. Pieter found only two really beautiful children; but none of the others left without Bella giving them sweets and pastries. Of the chosen two, one was a little girl, the two-year-old daughter of Mynheer Fourment, one of the most respected burghers of Antwerp. Little Helen had golden hair and a complexion of milk-and-roses. She was placed in the center of the composition; naked, bent a little, she led the seven children who carried the fruit. Albrecht, too, was included. But Clara could not be used—her body was still crippled, her small face too strong-featured and pain-lined.

The little Fourment girl was accompanied both by her mother and her elder brother. And, as on these occasions Bella's younger sister Clara was always present, Bella entertained the whole party in her rooms. In the evening she told her husband with a smile:

"I wish you had seen those young people this afternoon."

"What young people?"

"My sister and the Fourment boy."

"What happened? Did they take to one another?"

"Did they! They were both so confused that Clara dropped a plate and the boy upset the water jug. They blushed all the time and simply couldn't raise their eyes from the tablecloth. I could hardly keep from laughing."

"I'm glad to hear it. The Fourments are decent people and quite well-to-do. The boy is a likable lad. But his little sister is a wonder. I've never seen such a beautiful child in my life. Venus as a baby must have been like her."

There was a little pause; then Bella laughed out aloud. Pieter looked at her. "What is it, my dear?"

"I'm laughing at myself. You know, when you spoke of Helen Fourment, I felt jealous!"

"I'd be disappointed if you hadn't," replied Pieter with a smile.

He took her into his arms and kissed her.

"I think we shall never change," said Bella happily.

The Garland of Flowers was soon finished and sent to Milan in a sealed

packing case. The next week brought more visitors and commissions. When Jordaens, the young painter, had married the daughter of his master, Van Noort, Pieter and Bella had been among the wedding guests, and the numerous painters present had been indefatigable in trying to win the favor of their famous colleague. Pieter had felt uncomfortable, for he had received more attention than the young couple themselves. Van der Geest, who never missed an opportunity to mix with artists, had also been there. After listening to a flood of praise, Pieter had become interested in his words, and had drawn him aside for a few minutes.

"What's your opinion about my recent work, Mynheer, if you have seen it?"

"I've seen one or two of your pictures. They show great mastery of your craft. You deserve your popularity. There's just one thing I want to warn you against. Your hand is incredibly skillful, but why don't you teach your apprentices better?"

"You're taking the words from my own mouth. I'd teach them if it were any use—there isn't one lad of real talent among them. They are just craftsmen. If only I could find someone to suit me! Snijders is the only one I find of any use. There are other talented adult painters—young Jordaens is one of the best—but I need a pupil I can mold. . . . Yet there just isn't anybody. I've sent away at least a hundred candidates."

When they were walking home from the wedding, Bella spoke of the newly married groom.

"Pieter, someone has told me that this Jordaens is a strange man. A Protestant in secret. Tell me, what's the Olijfberg?"

"The Protestants have a secret society called the Mount of Olives. It is kept a strict secret, otherwise they would all land in prison. Van Noort is also one of them."

"Would they be punished very severely?"

Pieter did not answer for some time; he walked silently on by her side. Then he started.

"Did you ask me something? Forgive me, I was thinking of something else. What was it?"

"It doesn't matter. What were you thinking about?"

"Van der Geest told me something which touched me to the quick. I simply must find a talented pupil."

Next day, after finishing his work, Pieter went to the St. Luke Guild and met Verhagen, the art dealer, there.

"Willem," he said, "I'm worried. I fear for the fame of my studio—I can't find a talented apprentice. Could you suggest someone?"

Verhagen pondered the question with a deep frown.

"How old a boy do you want?" he asked.

"Between ten and fourteen. It doesn't matter."

"I don't know of anyone as young as that. I might find you one, but he's seventeen."

"They are difficult to mold at that age," Pieter said. "But I wouldn't mind seeing him. Could you send him along?"

"Of course I could. He'll be there tomorrow."

Next morning a strikingly handsome youth inquired at the studio for Mynheer Pieter Paul Rubens. He was thin and fragile; his appearance showed at the first glance that he had been well brought up. His features were regular, a little feminine, except for his long, straight nose. He reminded Pieter of an Adonis, an Antinoüs, or an Endymion.

"Verhagen sent me, sir. I brought some sketches."

Pieter nodded and reached for the sketches with some interest, for he had been pleased with the boy's appearance. But the first sketch made him intent—this youth obviously had an extraordinary talent. Pieter did not betray his excitement.

"These are very good. Where have you been working until now?"

"With Mynheer van Balen. I'm still there."

"And would he let you go? He's a kind man; we worked together in Van Noort's studio."

"He doesn't worry much about me."

"Tell me, my boy, haven't I seen you somewhere before? I pride myself on my memory for faces."

"Yes," the youth replied a little sulkily. "I thought you'd remember me; that's why I didn't introduce myself. My name is Anthony van Dyck. We met at your brother's wedding, Mynheer. I offered you some sweetmeats. . . ."

"How old were you then? Ten? How should I remember you?"

"Shouldn't Rubens remember a face?"

"You're right. Forgive me. Would you like to become my chief apprentice?"

"I have no greater desire, Mynheer."

He bowed smoothly, easily.

"You have excellent manners. Have you ever been a page?"

"No, but I've been given a good education. If you accept me, sir, you won't have reason to be ashamed of me even in front of your most distinguished visitors."

"I've already accepted you. You have considerable talent—and I flatter myself that I have a good eye for talent. You may become a great artist in time."

"Yes, sir," replied the boy gently and without a trace of pride, "I know."

"Good. I am glad that you believe in yourself. When can you start work?"

"Tomorrow morning."

The boy bowed and withdrew. Pieter opened the door of the studio and called to Bella.

"Darling, I have discovered a lad of great talent, and I am very happy. I'll tell you all about it this evening. What's Albrecht doing?"

"He's crying because I've forbidden him to suck his thumb."

"Tell him to cry louder. It's good for his lungs. All my love, dear."

V

Anthony van Dyck was quite different from all the other apprentices. He belonged to one of the richest families in Antwerp, and contrary to the usual custom he did not live at the Rubens house but at home. He dressed with great care and spent much time trimming his nails and combing his hair. When he arrived at the studio—always rather late—he greeted everyone with formal politeness, as if he were entering a ballroom. He frequently used French expressions and spoke with great ease and polish. His moods perpetually changed; within an hour he would be deliriously happy and plunged in the blackest melancholy, but no matter what his mood, he remained scrupulously polite.

The apprentices and the other employees in the studio rarely visited the living quarters of the house—and then only when specially invited. Van Dyck, however, made a point of paying a formal call on Bella. For ten minutes he talked with complete assurances of trivialities, and then took his leave.

"The heat is horrible," he told his master on the fourth day. "I shall not go home for dinner. Heat is such a torture to me that I prefer not to eat."

He languished in a chair. Pieter clapped him on the shoulder.

"Eat with us, boy. I want to have a chat with you anyway."

Any of the other apprentices would have been confused by so great an honor. But Anthony was perfectly at his ease. His table manners were impeccable. He started the conversation by enthusiastically praising the fabric of Bella's dress. He descanted with delight on the beauty of the colors and the fineness of the weaving.

"Do you love fine fabrics?" Bella asked.

"I adore them. And I know the reason for this passion of mine. My poor dear dead mother, while she was carrying me, worked with her needle from morning till night. She was so deeply engrossed in her needlework that I could hardly fail to have a passion for it."

"When did you lose your mother?"

"When I was eight. My sisters brought me up, but now they are all nuns. I have some younger sisters and brothers for whom I am responsible. My father is an extremely busy man. I assure you I have many worries. Our house is large and my father is very strict that the household should be properly managed."

"If I remember rightly, you live in the Korte Neuwstraat."

"Yes, sir, and the house, which is an old and beautiful one, has a name of its own: *Paulus in't Kasteel van Rijsel*. But I love your house even more. *Tout mon gout*. It is a pleasure to come here every morning."

"Well, if it's such a pleasure, you might be more punctual. The first lesson an artist much teach himself is discipline."

"It is kind of you to take an interest in me, sir. You will find it a thankless business. My father always says that I have absolutely no sense of time. But be assured that I shall try to conform with your wishes. I am infinitely grateful that you have taken me into your studio."

"I might have done so earlier. Why didn't you call on me?"

"I could not have done that, sir. I never act of myself. I always let things happen to me."

Pieter and Bella exchanged glances. Never before had they met so precocious a youth.

There was plenty of work to be done in the studio. The city of Mechlin was beginning to show great interest in Pieter's work. The Parish of St. John ordered a copy of the Three Magi. Shortly afterward three humble men appeared in the luxurious studio, men who seemed overawed by their surroundings and nervously turned their hats in their hands. They were the representatives of the Mechlin Fishermen's Guild. Like every guild unable to build a chapel of its own, the Mechlin fishermen considered it their sacred duty to pay for the maintenance and repair of one of the side altars of the local church. Their altar was in the Church of Our Lady, and the simple fishermen, who knew little of painting, had heard it said that they would be able to get a really nice picture from an Antwerp artist called Rubens. So three of them set out to order the picture. Pieter received them with special kindness, but found it difficult to make much headway in his discussion with them.

"What size do you want the picture to be?" he asked.

"A big one," came the answer, rather uncertainly.

"All right, but what size?"

One of them shrugged his shoulders.

"A big one," he repeated nervously.

"Didn't you bring the necessary measurements?"

"No. But you go ahead and paint the picture, Mynheer. If the worst happens, we can always cut some of it off."

And so the discussion went on. At last Pieter decided to go to Mechlin and see the altar for himself. He arranged a meeting with the fishermen. October the ninth was the date agreed upon; the fishermen were to meet him at noon in the Helmet Inn.

The journey caused Pieter considerable financial sacrifice, for every moment of the working day meant money. He was again having alterations made to the house, this time to the staircase. He had commissioned Jan van Mildert to build a fine stone balustrade with statues. Then, too, new work at the studio had been occasioned by the arrival of Jan Wildens from Italy, whom Pieter now employed. He was thirty-three and wanted to marry, but he had no capital to start an independent studio. He had called on Pieter and offered his collaboration as a landscape painter, to be specially employed in painting the backgrounds of the pictures turned out by the studio. The offer was welcome, for none of the apprentices excelled in this kind of work. And as Wildens was able to show Pieter some extremely fine examples of his work, an agreement was made on the spot. Pieter now had a most talented staff. Snijders, Wildens, and Van Dyck transformed his sketches into finished pictures, while the apprentices filled in the parts of the canvas for which the minimum of skill was necessary. Under their agreement, the three painters were permitted to undertake commissions on their own account and paint their pictures in the studio. Yet the practice of helping one another was continued. Snijders might paint a fish for Van Dyck, and Van Dyck a nude for Snijders. Indeed, it became increasingly difficult to tell which picture had been painted by which. And, when a picture passed out of the studio under the name of Rubens, usually every member of the staff had had a hand in it.

It was sometimes necessary for Pieter to go to Brussels so that he might not neglect his connections with the Court. There everyone was talking of what would happen when the twelve-year armistice expired—as would soon happen. The Archduke desired above all things peace for Flanders, but he could not be certain of preserving peace in all circumstances. The

Spanish Court was making no secret of its desire for war with the Netherlands, for Dutch shipping interests were providing unwelcome competition with Spain in the East Indies. Kings and governments everywhere were restless. In Paris the Duke of Condé faction had triumphed. Concini had been murdered, and the youthful Louis XIII had adopted the simple expedient of banishing his mother from the French capital. Maria Medici had retired to Blois, and Brussels was much disturbed to note that the pro-Spanish policy of the Queen Mother had failed. Yet there was ground for hope in the fact that the young French King had married Anne, Infanta of Spain, the niece of the Archduchess Isabella. The political temperature all over Europe was near boiling point. Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, had just defeated the Russians. In Germany, relations between the Protestant and Catholic princes were becoming more and more strained. The Archduke Ferdinand was embroiled in a war with Venice. In Turkey, Mustapha the Idiot had become Sultan, and the country was in revolt. There was trouble everywhere. The Archduke and the Archduchess liked to discuss these things with their court painter, whose sound judgment and political sense they valued highly.

"The world's fate and our own is well illustrated by this war between the blue and the yellow ruff."

"True enough," said the Archduke. "But do you know that the originator of the yellow ruff has been executed?"

An uninitiated person would not have understood all this. The ruff prescribed by Spanish fashion had to be carefully starched, but there was always a tinge of blue in the snow-white linen. A lady of the English Court had invented a starch with a yellowish tinge. Its use spread quickly, but only in the Protestant states. Throughout Europe it was possible to tell a Papist from a Protestant by the shade of his ruff.

"Has she really been executed?" Pieter asked in astonishment.

"Yes. I have just received news from London that an English knight was lately poisoned in the Tower. The crime was committed by Mrs. Turner, incited by Lord and Lady Somerset. The two main offenders have been punished by banishment, but Mrs. Turner has been beheaded. At her execution she wore a yellow ruff. We live in bloody times, Rubens. Every confidential report I receive is sure to contain news of executions, killings, and murders. Europe is more nervous than ever. I think of almost nothing but how peace may be preserved."

"Your Highness, I am quite insignificant, but I assure you nothing would make me happier than to give you some small assistance in your task."

"We shall count on you, Rubens. We know your qualities. I shall certainly call upon you if I need a discreet and skillful man for some confidential mission."

"Your Highness would soon find a task for me if you did not wait for events."

The Archduke rewarded this daring observation with a smile. He permitted his court painter more freedom than many of his courtiers.

"Discover a task to your liking, Rubens, and inform me of it. I shall turn away no one who is anxious to serve me."

From that moment Pieter constantly sought for an entrance to political life. He longed for a chance to prove himself. Eight years of the armistice had expired; there now remained only four. It was necessary for him to discover how the political factions in Brussels were preparing for the expiration of the armistice, and also how Amsterdam and The Hague were likely to react to the new situation. Before he set out for Mechlin he found an opportunity for an intimate talk with his father-in-law.

"Bella tells me that you have a near relation living in the Netherlands," he began.

"Yes. A nephew, and his name is also Jan Brant. He's a good fellow, a wealthy merchant. His local influence is such that the Prince of Orange is often glad to consult him."

"And does he take any part in political life?"

"Certainly. He's a strong supporter of old Olden-Barnevelt, which is natural, as my nephew is a Catholic and Olden-Barnevelt, though a Protestant, is tolerant to those who belong to other confessions—unlike most of his countrymen. But why are you so interested in him?"

"Because he may be able to help us to preserve peace. The Spanish Ambassador in Brussels is persuading the Court there to adopt a hostile attitude to the Netherlands. It has occurred to me that some good might come from a secret meeting between Prince Maurice's adviser and some person enjoying the trust of the Archduke Albrecht. The Archduke, I can assure you, is a man of good will, and desires peace above everything. The Duke of Lerma, on the other hand, is resolved on war against the Dutch, partly because it would please the Spanish clergy, partly because

the Spanish grandees feel their incomes threatened by Dutch commercial rivalry in the East Indies. It would be a great feat of diplomacy if the peace of Flanders could be saved in spite of all the chances against it. What do you say to the idea?"

"I am more than interested. I am willing to do anything to preserve peace, as you know."

"Then try to get in touch with your nephew. Do not write to him. But perhaps you could arrange a meeting and ask him whether he would care to help us. Do you think he would?"

"I am convinced he would do everything in his power. He's a man of courage and can keep a secret. I understand perfectly. Leave it to me."

And so the first step was taken. Rubens, the painter, had become an amateur diplomatist. He took care to inform himself of the smallest changes in Dutch politics. Dutch visitors frequently came to his studio, and he questioned them skillfully. He discovered that Dutch domestic affairs were extremely confused and complicated. There were, apparently, three warring elements. The States General, intolerant in religious matters yet desirous of national freedom; Olden-Barnevelt, the tyrannical republican indifferent to cleavages of religious doctrine; lastly the Prince of Orange, possessed of an elastic conscience and looking toward the throne of the Netherlands with greedy eyes. Any two of these factions were willing to combine against the third, and the political game changed almost from day to day. The foreign spectator needed acute political judgment to decide which of the players was most likely to gain supremacy. The Court of Brussels was of the opinion that it was best to treat with Prince Maurice, and yet the problem seemed extremely complicated, and by no means open to such an easy solution. But Pieter was not the man to be easily discouraged by difficulties. His sole intention was to bring the disputants together; he could hardly hope to influence the decisions—if any—reached by them. Peace ultimately depended upon a genuine desire for peace on both sides.

No one had any inkling of the political ambitions of the famous painter. Pieter left for Mechlin. He found the fishermen waiting for him at the Helmet Inn, and they had already had a few drinks. They were much surprised when their guest declined their strong gin and ate sparingly. At last the little party left the inn and went to inspect the altar in the Church of Our Lady. Pieter took his measurements, and noted the light-

ing. The subject was to be the miraculous catch in the Lake of Galilee. The fishermen, who had become talkative under the influence of the gin, expressed their various wishes. They wanted Christ to be in the picture and the net to be clearly visible; they also wanted Pieter to paint a "beautiful big fish," which, they said, would bring them luck. But when he told them he expected one thousand eight hundred guilders for the picture, they were dumbfounded. The master of the guild at once started to bargain, but Pieter interrupted him good-naturedly.

"We shall save time if we don't bargain," he said. "You wouldn't sell me fish at half price just because I'm a painter. If you can't pay what I ask, I'll find you a much cheaper painter. I promise to supervise the work, so you'll get the best picture available."

The fishermen began to whisper together. Clearly they were greatly disappointed. They returned to the Helmet Inn to continue the discussion, but they could not come to any decision. At length, they told Pieter that the matter would have to go before the guild as a whole; they would visit Antwerp again during the winter and let Pieter know what they had decided. This sounded as if he would not hear from them again. He did not mind for himself, but he was sorry for the sake of Snijders, Van Dyck, and the De Vos brothers, for he had intended to pass on the commission to one of them. The journey was not, however, entirely wasted. The altarpiece for the Church of St. John in Mechlin was entrusted to his studio, and he was able to arrange the details of the work with the curators.

When he got home, he found work proceeding smoothly in the studio. Van Dyck, Snijders, and Wildens were working excellently. Van Dyck, especially, was showing great progress; he was acquiring knowledge and experience in months which would have taken a lesser man years. Pieter was certain that his name would one day bring honor to his studio. In spite of his whims everyone liked the boy; his personality breathed an almost feminine charm which could hardly fail to fascinate. Indeed, his companions, far from being jealous, did everything they could to show him that they regarded him as quite an exceptional being. About this time he gave the studio fresh cause for astonishment. Masculine fashions had changed suddenly. Following the lead of the Spanish Court, tightly fitting breeches and hip-length jackets were being discarded, to be replaced by much more voluminous garments. Snijders and Wildens knew

nothing of this upheaval; they had neither the inclination nor the money to bother their heads over such trifles. But Anthony, being well-to-do, took infinite pains with his toilet. Most other men would have appeared ridiculous in this new attire, but he looked elegant and handsome. He would talk of nothing but the dictates of fashion with his master and refused to rest until Pieter, too, had ordered from his tailor loose breeches fastened below the knee with braid trimmed with real Flemish lace.

When Pieter met Bella after his return from Mechlin, much greater news was, however, awaiting him. She was expecting another child, and looking forward to its arrival as yet another consolation for her disappointment in her first-born. Clara would be seven next spring; she was paralyzed from the hips downward, and the doctor held out scant hope of her recovery. Her mental development, too, was somewhat retarded. She had not begun to talk until she was three; even play bored her. She was a sad, silent little creature who preferred to sit sadly in her chair hour after hour, day after day. Albrecht, on the other hand, was lively, handsome, and naughty. He had turned three, and he never stopped talking. Every evening Bella had stories to tell about his latest escapades.

Pieter considered whom he should request to be godfather to the new baby. At last he decided to ask Count Pallavicini, for whom he had painted a picture in Sampierdarena. That distinguished gentleman replied in a long and friendly letter that he would be proud to be godfather to the child of an artist whose fame had already spread throughout Italy.

"So his name will be Nicolaas," said Pieter one day at table.

"How do you know it will be a boy again?" laughed Bella.

"I am perfectly certain. You mustn't even think of girls' names. But, if it should be a girl, we must ask Philips's widow to be godmother, and the child's name must be Maria. Do you mind? No. Well, that's settled."

The child would not be born for some months, but Pieter already spoke of it as if it were alive. Bella, who had suffered greatly during her first pregnancy and not inconsiderably during her second, was this time in splendid health and looked prettier than ever.

Pieter had almost forgotten the fishermen of Mechlin, but one February day they unexpectedly arrived. It took them some time to come to the point.

"Well," said Pieter at last, "have you decided to employ the cheaper painter?"

"No, Mynheer," replied their spokesman. "We have decided that our picture must be the best possible."

"But I have already told you that I have my fixed scale of charges. It's useless to bargain with me. Won't you reconsider your decision and allow me to recommend you to someone else?"

"We can pay your price, Mynheer, although we are poor men. We have made a collection among the fishermen in other towns—we often help each other out in an emergency—and we have the sixteen hundred guilders."

Pieter remembered distinctly that he had said eighteen hundred guilders, but he felt so touched that he deliberately forgot the higher figure.

"So you have collected the money I asked for? It's greatly to your credit. I'll paint you a picture you can be proud of."

A few days later the sketch was ready. The Savior was standing in a beached boat, around him the fishermen, delighted by the huge catch in the net, their faces like those of the fishermen of Mechlin, the simple, honest faces of men who toiled hard for their daily bread and only required peace to be happy in their work.

But Pieter did not forget his new political undertakings. His father-in-law had suddenly been called away on urgent business to Holland. He returned in great good humor. So that he should not be disturbed in what he had to say about Holland, he invited Pieter for a walk.

"Your idea has taken root in fruitful soil," he began. "My nephew Jan, who sends you his warmest greetings, is prepared to work with heart and soul for peace. But he's of the opinion that we must wait a short time before making any move, for in the Netherlands an important event is impending. Jan made me swear that, apart from you, I wouldn't breathe a word of it to anyone, and I accepted full responsibility for your discretion. Prince Maurice has decided to settle accounts with Olden-Barnevelt. That skillful and autocratic old gentleman is causing both the States General and the Prince a great deal of trouble. The Prince is convinced that he can rely on the co-operation of the States General, if he makes a determined stand against him. Things will come to a head soon. Then your idea will have some practical point, and we shall have a person of undisputed authority to negotiate with, for the Prince will be master of the country."

Pieter nodded approvingly.

"I've brought some other news for you," Brant continued. "In The Hague there's an Englishman called Sir Dudley Carleton. For five years he has been representing England in Venice; now he has been transferred to The Hague; and he has brought with him a really wonderful art collection: he is a great connoisseur. But he wants to exchange his collection of *gemmae*, medals, and statues for paintings. Someone suggested that you might help him, and he is writing to you."

A few days later a letter from Sir Dudley was delivered to Pieter by George Gape, an English political agent. The proposition it contained intensely interested Pieter. There were some finished pictures in the studio which had not been commissioned and were waiting for a buyer. Pieter glanced again over Sir Dudley's letter and reflected that it would be a better bargain to exchange them for the Englishman's collection than to sell them in the ordinary way. He at once decided to go with Gape to The Hague to examine the collection. It would be easy for him at the same time to establish contact with young Jan Brant. He could not leave Antwerp at once, however, partly because Gape had an urgent mission in Spain, partly because he himself had soon to attend the ceremony of Van Dyck's formal initiation as a master painter in St. Luke's Guild. The young man was only nineteen. Pieter therefore contented himself with sending a letter to Sir Dudley Carleton by a Flemish nobleman whom he knew. He received a verbal answer to which he sent the following reply:

Most Excellent Sir:

My friend informs me that Your Excellency has a mind to exchange part of your art collection—the value of which I accept at your estimate—for specimens of my work. I assume that you have acquired your collection with expert knowledge and care, although a gentleman of birth usually gets the worse of a bargain, whether buying or selling. It is not my custom, however, to take such advantages. Your Excellency may be assured that I have valued my pictures as accurately as if they were being exchanged in terms of money. In this matter you may trust my word as a gentleman. I have a choice collection of my works now in my studio. Some of them are awaiting purchasers; some I have kept because I was unwilling to part with them; some I have actually bought back from their original owners at a price in excess of that for which I sold them. All these I place at Your Excellency's disposal because I like a bargain to be struck

quickly and with a minimum of fuss, and because I am so inundated with commissions from private individuals and public bodies that for a considerable time to come I could hardly settle down to any work with which you might be disposed to honor me. If, as I hope, we can come to some agreement, I shall at once finish the pictures which are still unfinished. The pictures in the following list are completely ready, and these I could send to Your Excellency immediately. Indeed, I am prepared to send you these pictures, which I value at six thousand guilders, as a token of my good faith, and as a sign of my confidence in your sense of fairness, in exchange for your entire collection of antiques, which I have not seen and the valuation of which I leave entirely to you.

Here is the list:

Size:	Guilders:	
6' x 8'	500	Prometheus Bound—with an eagle feeding on his liver. Entirely my own work, with the exception of the eagle, which was painted by Snijders.
8' x 12'	600	Daniel with the Lions. Lions painted from a living animal. All my own work.
9' x 11'	600	Leopards, painted from nature, with satyrs and nymphs. My own work, except the background, which was painted by an acknowledged master.
7' x 10'	500	Leda with the Swan and Cupid. My own work.
12' x 6'	500	Christ on the Cross, life size. Said to be the best picture I have ever painted.
13' x 9'	1200	The Last Judgment. Painted for His Highness the Duke of Neuburg in a larger scale for 3500 guilders. This smaller copy was begun by a pupil of mine, but I shall complete it myself, and it will be indistinguishable from an original.
7' x 8'	500	St. Peter discovering the gold coin in the fish. My own work.
8' x 11'	600	Horsemen in a Lion Hunt. Begun by one of my pupils after my original picture

Size:	Guilders:	
		which I painted for His Highness the Duke of Bavaria. Revised by myself.
3' x 4'	50 each	Christ and the Twelve Apostles. Painted by my pupils after the originals which I did for the Duke of Lerma; the copies revised by myself.
9' x 10'	600	Achilles in Woman's Dress. Painted by my best pupils, revised by myself.
7' x 4'	300	St. Sebastian (nude). My own work.
7' x 5'	300	Susanna. Work of one of my pupils, revised by myself.

Pieter intended these twenty-four pictures as a basis for bargaining. His letter was a little sanguine: the pictures which he called almost finished had only advanced as far as the first sketches and sometimes not even so far. But this did not matter, for he still had the sketches of the Lerma series, and the boys could copy them in a few days. Sir Dudley replied at once, inviting Pieter to The Hague; he said he did not wish him to buy a pig in a poke. He accepted the prices as a basis for bargaining, but only in the case of Pieter's own pictures; he did not want the work of his pupils. He would rather have Brussels tapestries in their place. They continued their correspondence and finally struck a bargain without Pieter's having to go to The Hague. He might expect the famous collection of antiques to arrive almost any day.

But his child arrived first. On May 23, Nicolaas Rubens was born, a splendid baby. At the christening Andrea Picheneotti, a distinguished Italian who lived in Antwerp deputized for the godfather. In the Rubens house there was great happiness. At first Albrecht was afraid the new baby might threaten his own position as favorite and proposed that they should drown it in the Scheldt; but, when he saw that his fears were unnecessary, he resigned himself to the presence of a younger brother.

"You're the bigger and stronger one," Pieter told him; "you must defend your brother if anyone tries to harm him."

This completely changed Albrecht's attitude, and he became a most possessive and protective older brother.

Pieter considered it his duty to announce his elation in person to the

archducal pair; in any case, he wanted to discuss politics with the Regent. His plan for saving the peace filled his thoughts continuously. He went to Brussels. He had already heard from Rockox that there had been disorders in Prague but did not ascribe any importance to the news. But in the Flemish capital there was great excitement; he met armed Spanish troops marching through the streets. He hurried to the palace but was unable to obtain an audience. In Salinas's office a polite young man gave him the message:

"His Highness asks you, Mynheer, to call on the Chancellor. He is the only person who is free to see you now."

He went to see Peckius, the Chancellor of Brabant. This statesman was an old acquaintance of his; he had painted his portrait. His face seemed at first glance utterly expressionless, but a closer glance revealed his spiritual weariness, his constant suspicion and gloomy thoughts.

"What's the trouble, Your Excellency?"

"The trouble is great indeed, my friend. We're worried about the expiration of the armistice, and in the meantime all Europe may burst into flame. The twenty-third of May, 1618, is a fatal date."

"It is the day on which my son was born."

"It is possibly the birthday of a European war, too. Briefly, the Protestant nobles of Bohemia have openly revolted against Matthias. Two of his governors have been thrown from the windows of the Hradein. God must have preserved them miraculously; they fell from a height of more than eighty feet, shots were fired after them, and yet both survived. But a miracle isn't enough to save the world."

"But can't this Bohemian affair be isolated?"

"I am afraid that is impossible. The Roman Empire has been cut in two by the Reformation. The Emperor's greatest territories are at mortal enmity. The schism between the Lutherans and the Calvinists only serves to complicate the position. And the other countries are by no means free of internal strife. There are potential causes of trouble everywhere. Think of Venice, the power of which we have just begun to undermine through the offices of our Viceroy at Naples. Or consider Savoy, which was an Italian state until Henry IV forced it to conform to French interests. Think of our master, Spain, whose government is on the verge of great changes. Have you heard the latest news from Valladolid? No, you couldn't have. Have you met the son of the Duke of Lerma?"

"No. He was not at Court when I was there."

"That was to be expected. He avoids meeting his father whenever he can. Anyway, this man, the Duke of Useda, has apparently decided to overthrow his father, and his coup shows every possibility of succeeding. Not that the change will make much difference to us. The son is just as greedy for money and power as his father. But it is an extremely serious business for the rest of the world that at a time of great uncertainty and distrust one of the greatest powers should have no responsible government, and have its policy left to the vagaries of intriguing courtiers. And is the situation any better elsewhere? Maria Medici has escaped from Blois. She had to leave by a rope from an upper window, and Her Majesty is no longer young. After several attempts to descend, her followers tied her up in a sheet and lowered her to the ground like a piece of furniture. And now she's wandering about somewhere in France—no one knows where. I shouldn't be surprised if we were honored by her company some time soon; people who quarrel with the King of France usually seek refuge with us. But that is a small matter. The possibilities of the revolt in Prague are of far greater consequence."

"You think there is genuine cause for alarm?"

"Yes. I can't rid myself of the idea that the revolt may turn into a war, a war which may last for three or four years, and perhaps longer."

"Will you permit me to think aloud for a few moments, Your Excellency?"

"Certainly. You're a far-sighted fellow, Rubens. Your ideas always interest me."

"Thank you. Well, according to the Latin tag, the world is governed by stupidity. The Christian powers fight among themselves, and the Moslems look on with a grin to see Christ defeated."

"The Sultan of Turkey is an idiot."

"I know that, but I also know that the Janissaries are lusting to seize power, and they are strong. Look at the map, Your Excellency. They have penetrated deep into Europe like the spreading of some malignant cancer. The greater part of Hungary is in their hands. Some people say that the Holy Roman Emperor is sacrificing the Hungarians to the Turk in an effort to appease their rage and so save Vienna and Prague. But it's impossible for the Hungarians to stem the tide for ever. All Christendom ought to march against the Turk. When I was court painter

in Mantua, I often heard His Highness the Duke speak of his campaigns in Hungary. He told me that the Hapsburgs considered that the chief use of Hungary was to be a battleground on which to meet the Turks. The Hungarians will vanish utterly—they are too few. After they are beaten, the turn of Vienna will come. And then it will be only a matter of time before the rest of Europe falls under the Turkish yoke.”

“Tell me, Rubens,” Peckius asked with a smile. “What connection have you with the Hungarians?”

“None at all, sir. All I know of them is that they are the best horsemen in Europe—not excepting the Spanish. And I think all good horsemen must have a certain nobility. I only mention them because they are holding the gateway of Europe. By helping them we should also be helping ourselves. If the Turks take Vienna, then Augsburg, Cologne, and Antwerp will also fall. And I want my two sons to grow up in a Christian world.”

“You mustn’t ask us to forget the Turks because of your sons. Politics don’t depend on sentiment. The Hungarians have allied their fate with that of the Hapsburg dynasty. One may pity a people who are destined to be destroyed, but do you pity today the Quadi, the Vandals, the Visigoths, the Avars, the Marcomanni? Don’t fear for the Hungarians; the Hapsburgs have drawn them into their sphere of influence so that they might be free to deal with more purely western problems. The divine mission, as almost everyone recognizes, belongs to the Hapsburgs, not to the Hungarians. We Flemings can’t stand on our own feet in a world which contains the Spanish world empire, the Holy Roman Empire, Dutch sea power, and a vigorous and thriving England. Europe is facing an immense trial, and our task is to maneuver so that this small piece of earth may escape the storm. And in that task I count on you. His Highness tells me you want to serve. Is there anything you wish to say to me?”

“Yes, and that is my chief reason for visiting Brussels, Your Excellency. To come to the point at once, I am in a position to put you in unofficial contact with Prince Maurice.”

“Indeed. Most interesting. What exactly have you in mind?”

Pieter described in detail the purpose of his father-in-law’s recent journey to The Hague and young Jan Brant’s estimate of the present

situation in Holland. He also mentioned his correspondence with the English Ambassador at The Hague.

"Well, our own information tells us that there will be trouble sooner or later between the Prince and Olden-Barnevelt," said Peckius when he had finished. "When that struggle is over, we shall know with whom it will be worth our while to start unofficial conversations. We have several means of approaching the problem, so do not imagine that we are relying only on you. But, at the same time, I strongly urge you to set to work as if the fate of Flanders depended on you alone. Will you promise me to do that?"

"My promise is not to you, Your Excellency, but to Flanders, to Antwerp, to my own street, my own house, my own sons."

"Good. Now go home and we shall await developments in Holland."

Back in Antwerp, Pieter again plunged into work. Money flowed into his coffers, while his collaborators earned far more than they would have done in studios of their own. Representatives of princes, churches, and monasteries came from far afield to commission pictures. Antwerp, too, reserved her finest tasks for Pieter. The cathedral authorities decided to build a new high altar, and everyone, artists and general public alike, considered it natural that Rubens should paint the altarpiece.

Not even his closest associates, however, had the slightest inkling that Pieter occupied his mind with anything but painting. Only Bella knew from the casual sentences he dropped during their hours alone that he was becoming more and more passionately interested in politics. In this year of 1618 men were greatly troubled by three comets which flashed across the heavens.

One evening Pieter came home in a state of high excitement. Bella was nursing Nicolaas; the other children were asleep.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked.

"On the orders of the Prince of Orange, Dutch soldiers have arrested Olden-Barnevelt. He is to be indicted. Send for your father, my dear, and when he comes see that no one disturbs us."

About half an hour later Jan Brant arrived, and together they went to Pieter's room. Bella heard the key turn in the lock.

VI

The engravings made after Pieter's pictures became increasingly popular. Only a rich man could afford the luxury of a Rubens painting; but the man of modest means could easily buy one of his engravings. And these engravings represented a substantial addition to his income. He did not sell the engraving rights outright, but insisted on a percentage on all sales. Other painters, too, followed this practice, but only the wealthier ones. Poor artists could not afford to wait for their money.

Pieter had now acquired great authority in the St. Luke Guild. The younger painters all tried to imitate his methods and discover the secret of his success. He was much occupied with the question, who was the real owner of a work of art, and he would expound his views at great length to his fellow guildsmen.

"An idea is just as much your personal property as the chain you wear round your neck," he would say. "Society is not sufficiently aware of this and doesn't treat our work with the respect it should. I will give you one example. Moretus publishes five hundred copies of an engraving of one of my pictures. He pays the engraver's fee, bears the cost of the paper, and the risk of the undertaking. For this he is entitled to a reasonable share of the profits. And so am I, for the engraving owes its existence to me, and it is sold chiefly on my reputation. This is as it should be, although I think the sharing of the profits could be more to our advantage. The artist is usually in a weaker position than the publisher, because he needs money more than the publisher needs pictures. The artist finds it difficult to secure another publisher; the publisher has no difficulty in finding artists to work for him. But this is really only a minor aspect of the question. The essential point is that the artist shall share in the profits. But where do I stand if some unknown Antwerp printer decides to make engravings of my pictures without my leave? Or to go further, what happens if a publisher at The Hague does the same thing? In my opinion, a man who does that is a thief, just as much as if he had stolen a ring of mine. And what remedy has a painter when that happens?

He must do his utmost to obtain protective patents in the countries concerned. Perhaps if he has exceptionally good connections he will be successful, but don't you see how scandalous such treatment is? Why don't the laws of countries protect the private property of our brains? I tell you, my friends, mankind is still primitive in its appreciation of spiritual goods. This is an injustice against which we must fight with all our strength. I can't envisage yet the strategy of this battle, for we should require immense influence to force all countries to pass the necessary laws. I don't think even our grandchildren will live to see the victory, for such things come only after centuries of slow evolution in men's habits of thought. In the meantime let us do whatever we can to improve matters. Let us lose no opportunity of proclaiming our views, or of branding every offending publisher."

And the painters, who looked up to him as their leader, would applaud enthusiastically. But they did not do much more. Few of them succeeded in obtaining foreign patents. Pieter himself resolved to do everything possible to protect himself from being robbed abroad. Several engravings had come to his notice which had been made in Holland and France without his permission. He started proceedings in both these countries, and also in his own, where certain publishers thought themselves entitled to bring out engravings of any picture they liked without the leave of the artist. He began by begging an audience with the Archduke, so that he might explain his conception of artistic and spiritual property.

His Highness was sympathetic; he sent for one of his jurists and instructed him to act in accordance with Pieter's wishes. Pieter himself assisted in drawing up the document, dated January 29, 1619, which declared that no one had the right to make engravings from his pictures without his express permission.

But this was not enough. He now began to inquire how he could obtain a similar document to protect himself in the Netherlands. Vaenius, his former master, had a brother in Holland, Pieter van Veen, to whom Pieter wrote for help. On his advice, Pieter sent a petition to the States General. At the same time he took steps to obtain a French patent. And here the Brussels Court helped him. The Archduchess Isabella was the aunt of the French child-Queen, and a letter of recommendation from her carried considerable weight.

He received a reply from Holland within a few weeks. The Dutch

government refused to grant him a patent. But this did not discourage him in the least. He at once took up the struggle in another way. He wrote again to Van Veen and also to young Jan Brant; and he enlisted the help of Sir Dudley Carleton.

It was now some time since his bargain with the British diplomatist had been concluded. His pictures had been dispatched to The Hague, and one day the famous Carleton collection of antiques had arrived in Antwerp. Pieter wanted to dance for joy. Never had he seen so many precious things collected together in one place. He could have stocked a museum with his new treasures. Among them was a real Egyptian mummy, the first to be seen in Antwerp. Rockox, Van der Geest, and other experts came to examine the collection; they argued for hours over the inscription on a Greek medal and handled the objects with loving care.

"What did you feel when you received all these treasures?" the Mayor asked.

"Regret that poor Philips cannot enjoy them."

For a long time he enjoyed an exciting pastime; he took out the items of the collection one by one and tried to familiarize himself with their beauty and meaning. He frequented libraries and consulted books, adding to his own library a number of volumes on archaeology.

For his part, Sir Dudley was enchanted by the pictures. He had been rather bored with his own collection, and, as a diplomatist who had to move often, he found it inconvenient to carry about such unwieldy objects. Pictures were much easier to pack and transport. Few men could pride themselves on possessing such a collection of pictures by Rubens. Thus the parties to the exchange felt most friendly to each other. Pieter found a warm response to his request for help about his patent. Sir Dudley replied that he would write a new petition but make more careful preparations for its reception. He enclosed a list of Dutch politicians whom the gift of a fine engraving might make more sympathetic to Pieter's request. Soutman, one of the most skillful engravers of the time, had come from Holland to Antwerp and made two splendid engravings after two of Pieter's pictures. Pieter sent copies of these with a polite letter to the people on Sir Dudley's list. Then he awaited the result.

But the Dutch answer was delayed. Instead, the French patent arrived with a surprising enclosure. It was sent not to Pieter directly but to

Gevartius, the historian, whom Rockox had given a sinecure at the Town Hall so that he should have leisure to write his Latin poems and historical essays. Like Rockox, Gevartius also had been corresponding with Peiresc. And both of them often mentioned Pieter in their letters. Peiresc was no longer a young man—he had become an important political figure in France and was in touch by correspondence with every great European scientist and philosopher. When he discovered from Gevartius that Rubens had applied for the patent granted so rarely by the French authorities, he took up the matter himself, helped to force it through, and sent the patent himself to Gevartius for his old friend.

In Holland, Pieter met ever new difficulties. The officials argued that he was *not* a Dutch subject. This was *not* a very pertinent objection for, after all, even a foreign subject could expect immunity from being robbed of his property. But his arguments were of no avail, the States General refused the patent—at least for the time being. But the Flemish and French patents offered a rich business opportunity which Pieter was quick to seize, as it would mean a larger share of the profits. He decided to undertake the risk of publication himself. He established a special engraving shop in his studio. And, after he had tried almost every engraver in the city, he chose the most skillful, Vorsterman, as his constant collaborator.

This Lucas Vorsterman had also come from Holland to Flanders. He had a magic skill with the needle and chisel. He could reproduce the colors of an original oil painting in high lights and shadows with amazing fidelity. He was strikingly handsome, which was one reason why Pieter employed him, for he liked youth and beauty around himself. But there was a restless and strange look in his eyes, as if he were haunted. He had recently married the daughter of Vranckx, the printer. But his behavior was not that of a young husband on his honeymoon. He worked gloomily and silently, refusing to take part in conversation. Sometimes his lips moved: he was praying. He was a most zealous Catholic and had had to leave the Netherlands because of his faith.

There was not a moment to spare in the studio, indeed it was impossible to catch up with the commissions. Pieter had to set more and more distant dates for delivery, as he liked to be punctual in keeping his obligations. He had just finished the painting for the Mechlin fishermen. He wrote to the honest men that it was ready and they were so impatient

to see it that they came to fetch it themselves. When Pieter showed them the canvas, the oldest burst into tears and then, together with the others, fell on his knees and began to pray.

"Do you want to take it away yourselves?" Pieter asked.

"Yes, Mynheer; they are expecting it at home as soon as possible."

"But you'll find it difficult to transport in a cart."

"Oh no, Mynheer. We're fishermen, so we'll take it by water. There's a big barge of ours moored on the Scheldt."

"Oh, yes, of course. Well, I'll be there to help you when you load it on the barge."

The fishermen spent the whole night packing the picture and then carried it with great care to the river. Pieter was also there and stared after the diminishing barge for a long time. Then he rode home. He set to work on a large sketch: the Jesuits had given him a new commission. The canonization of Francis Xavier was being decided upon in Rome, and they wanted to have a picture of the new saint ready in good time. Then Van der Geest asked Pieter to paint the Battle of the Amazons. At first he did not care for the task; he disliked painting battle pieces. But then the idea came to him suddenly of placing the whole battle on a bridge, and somehow this made him more enthusiastic: he was excited by the possibility of painting the nude women fighting on horseback, crowded together, while some of them fell into the water.

That was only a painted battle. But the threat of real battles was stronger than ever. The revolt in Prague in the previous year seemed about to release the dogs of war. The news was all of tension, agitation, armed preparations; the greatest tension of all was in the Netherlands. The trial of Olden-Barnevelt was on all lips; the Prince of Orange had had him tried by a special court and had taken good care that his judges should include the men whom the powerful autocrat had humiliated and oppressed. The Prince triumphed: Olden-Barnevelt, the greatest statesman of Holland, was sentenced to death and executed.

Pieter concealed his excitement at the news of the execution. He spent the morning making sketches for new pictures, attending to his correspondence, interviewing clients, touching up the work of his collaborators and apprentices. When dusk came, his father-in-law arrived and the two men locked themselves in and had a long conference. The time had obviously come for young Jan Brant to approach the Prince. The armistice had

still two years to run, but the latest information at the Court of Brussels suggested that Spain was as intent as ever on war. The Duke of Lerma had at last fallen from favor to be replaced by his own son, who was, however, as devoted to the clerical faction as his father. And the Spanish clergy were demanding war against Protestant Holland. The interests of the grandees in the East Indies were threatened by Dutch traders, and they, too, were clamoring for war. The Dutch were indeed furthering their commercial interests in the Orient with great diligence and foresight. They had built a fortress on the island of Java, which they called Batavia, and obviously intended to defend their commerce against all comers. The Spaniards, on the other hand, took no precautions for the future—they merely wanted war now.

Pieter made another journey to Brussels, where he found the Court in mourning. Matthias had died, and Ferdinand the Second had replaced him on the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. The mourning was, however, only formal. The Court was really glad at the change of rulers, for Matthias had been unable to protect the interests of the dynasty. The Czechs had dethroned him and made Frederick of Pfalz, the son-in-law of King James of England, their king. The new Hapsburg could hardly be less satisfactory than his predecessor.

The Archduke was very busy, and Pieter was able to see him only for a short time. Albrecht was irritable, tired, and nervous; he had aged rapidly during the past months. He was as affable as ever to his court painter, but he could not conceal the nervous tension in which he lived. Pieter withdrew quickly and went in search of Peckius.

"Your Excellency, the execution of Olden-Barnevelt creates an entirely new situation," he told the Chancellor. "I suggest that we establish secret contact with the Prince of Orange immediately. I am at your service."

"Very well, take whatever action you think necessary. But I must tell you that you are not the only one to whom this idea has occurred. Perhaps you saw a lady in my anteroom."

"Yes, I noticed a rather stout, foreign lady."

"That was Berchtholda Swieten. She is a widow and, at any rate in my opinion, a rather queer person. She tells me that out of pure love of peace she would like to establish contact with the Prince on our behalf. She has already traveled three times between The Hague and Brussels. I have more than a suspicion that she is not entirely to be trusted. If you

have anyone on whom you can absolutely rely at The Hague, I should be glad to have a confidential report on her activities."

"I shall do what I can, Your Excellency. But I must tell you frankly that the lady annoys me."

"Why?"

"Perhaps because I am selfish and vain. I want to be the one to secure peace for my country. But no matter. . . . Can you tell me, Your Excellency, on what conditions His Highness would consent to prolong the armistice?"

"His Highness would accept any terms which would not mean a humiliating diplomatic defeat for Spain. Unfortunately the Netherlands cling tenaciously to the claim that they are a sovereign state, a claim which we as the representatives of Spain cannot accept. We cannot make peace with a power which we consider inferior. But it is possible to make an armistice with anyone. I will give you the text of the agreement which is at present in force. Study it carefully. Come back tomorrow and I shall give you detailed instructions."

Pieter went away with the agreement, which covered many pages. As he left the room he cast a quick glance at the rival peacemaker. She looked like a bad-tempered old woman who knew what she wanted, but certainly not like a cunning spy.

He then called on Breughel, who had temporarily removed to Brussels to execute the many commissions he had received from the Court. He found him well, though complaining that he was growing old.

"Last year I was a man in my prime; but now I am old," he grumbled.

"What do you mean 'old'?" Pieter asked laughing. "How old are you?"

"I'm fifty-one."

"Nine years older than I am. I'm sure this feeling of yours is just a passing mood, old fellow. I shall certainly not feel old at your age, and not even when I'm well past sixty."

"But you're healthy. If you were to say that you were thirty-five, everyone would believe you."

And Pieter felt that Breughel was speaking the truth. His friend really did look an old man, while he himself felt young. He was still a good horseman; his muscles were strong, his wind sound. He never had a cold; his eye was keen, his hearing perfect.

Back in his lodgings, he began to study the armistice agreement. It

was written in Italian, the usual language of diplomacy. He spoke that language as well as his own. He read the text three times, made some notes, and after that was prepared to pass the stiffest examination on it. Next day, after a long discussion, Peckius dismissed him with the words:

"I knew we had entrusted this matter to a man with a good brain, but I didn't realize it was quite as good. As soon as you have any news, let me know—but not by letter. The matter is too delicate for any but verbal communication."

Thus Pieter's diplomatic activities started. His first task was to discover Prince Maurice's reactions to a possible renewal of the armistice. Old Brant was willing to travel to The Hague as often as necessary. He also suggested a trustworthy courier, a friend whose business often took him to Holland. It was not long before Pieter learned that Berchtholda Swieten was a harmless person with a bee in her bonnet; she liked to dabble in politics, of which she had not the slightest knowledge. As she was nothing if not tenacious, it was probable that she would obtain an audience with the Prince, although it was unlikely that His Highness would employ such a person as a go-between. Pieter informed Peckius of this.

He could not go to Brussels in person, so he sent a letter with a friend of his. He was busier than ever at the studio, and to some of his clients he could promise delivery of their pictures only in two years' time. To make things even worse, all his collaborators fell in love that summer. The rumors of war filled the very air with an almost unbearable tension. Frederick of the Palatinate had accepted the crown of Bohemia, and so Ferdinand would have to fight for its possession sooner or later. Parts of Hungary had revolted against the Emperor, and Gabriel Bethlen made no secret of his intention to take up arms in the defense of religious freedom. He was already ruler of the province of Transylvania and seemed likely to seize the crown of Hungary itself. New names were emerging everywhere, and many of them boded war. The tension was so great that men seemed to fly to love as a release.

Anthony van Dyck startled Bella by falling in love with her. He made no mention of his passion, but his constant moods, his blushes, his dreamy looks betrayed it. Bella was the first to perceive his feelings toward her. She regarded the matter as a joke, although she did not laugh but treated Van Dyck with a maternal compassion which filled Pieter with admira-

tion. He himself was sincerely fond of Anthony and proud to have him as a pupil; but he could not treat his love for Bella lightly. He was sure of Bella, but he feared that the boy himself would suffer, being of so sensitive a nature. One day he said to him:

"Anthony, my son, it is time to think of your trip abroad."

Van Dyck blushed deeply and replied after a brief pause:

"Yes, sir. I must go away if you advise it."

"It is not so very urgent. You have become my right-hand man. I cannot let you go immediately. We will speak of the matter again later."

"As you wish, sir. I . . . I should like to ask your permission to do something. I should like to paint the portrait of our mistress."

"We shall be honored, Anthony."

Pieter reflected that it was no uncommon thing for a pupil to be in love with the wife of his master. But it was not uncommon also for the pupil to forget his love as soon as he left the country. He was doubly kind to Anthony.

The second lover was Wildens. This thirty-six-year-old simpleton fell in love with a Stappaerts girl. And from that moment he was hardly of any use in the studio. He became absent-minded, parted his hair in a different way, and used such a strong perfume that even the apprentices protested. One day Pieter felt he must talk to him.

"I say, Wildens, why don't you give up that girl if she doesn't appreciate your advances?"

Wildens turned pale. He was astonished and embarrassed that anyone should know his secret. But he collected his wits and replied indignantly:

"What do you mean, she doesn't appreciate my advances? She wants to marry me."

"Then why are you going about like a moon-struck sheep? Be glad of your luck and work as you've never worked before. Anyway, accept my best wishes. I hear she is a pretty, well-to-do, and well-bred girl."

"She? There is no one like her in the whole world."

Wildens celebrated his engagement and fixed his wedding for October. He was now much more composed, because he could discuss the matter with his colleagues.

The third to lose his wits was Vorsterman, the engraver. He was married, but his young wife had just told him that she was going to have a baby. He seemed to go quite mad. Four or five times a day he left his

work in great agitation, upsetting chairs and knocking over bottles of acid, and rushed home to discover how his wife felt. He prayed constantly, even while working; sometimes he remained on his knees for half an hour at a stretch. Pieter took him aside and tried to reason with him—but with little effect. One day he came to Pieter, asked him to be the child's godfather, and burst into tears. Pieter agreed, but told him that unless he tried to control himself and applied himself more earnestly to his work he would withdraw his consent.

The fourth and to Pieter the most important victim was Clara, Bella's younger sister. Daniel Fourment, the brother of the little Helen Fourment whom Pieter had once painted, had been greatly interested in her at that time. They had met again at Wildens's engagement feast, whose bride was related to the Fourment family; this new meeting was like a spark in a powder magazine, and they fell madly in love. There were no obstacles to a match: both the young people were well-to-do, and their families had other cause for pride, for hers contained a famous artist and his had noble blood and also a famous relative in Hugo Grotius, the jurist and statesman.

The wedding took pace with suitable pomp at the end of September. Throughout the banquet Pieter held the little Helen on his knee. He could never have his fill of her beauty; her amusing chatter delighted him. She, too, was fond of her Uncle Pieter and embraced him when she left.

On the way home Bella was silent and in low spirits; something seemed to be troubling her. She was always mistress of herself, but she could never deceive Pieter's sharp eye. After they went to bed, he knew that she was crying.

"What's the matter, my darling?"

"I saw how you caressed that little Fourment girl, how you delighted in her beauty."

"Just because I played a little with a five-year-old girl, you're crying?"

"No, it isn't that. My heart aches for our little girl. God forgive me, but I can't love little Helen as I should. I can't conquer my envy. Why isn't our daughter healthy and she the cripple?"

"Bella, how can you speak like that—you who are gentleness and kindness itself? It is right to desire the best for your child—but why wish evil for someone else's?"

"You're right, Pieter, forgive me. I hardly knew what I was saying. But

I've brooded so much over Clara. Would you let me go on a pilgrimage with her to Our Lady of Loreto?"

"It's easy to plan such a journey," Pieter said, stroking her hand. "You must believe in miracles, it's true. But I'm too reasonable; I think if a miracle happens it comes to you and it is vain to run after it. And, if I told you, all right, go to Loreto, do you know what a journey that means? Just now, through unruly countries? and what would happen to the boys? Would you leave them for months without your care? And what if war spreads, making it impossible for you to return? All my life I've maintained that there is no more hateful thing in the world than war. But as for our little girl . . . don't trust to miracles, my dear, but to the Master of Miracles, to God. . . ."

"Can I hope for her recovery? Do you have any faith in it?"

"Absolutely." He tried to say this in as confident a tone as he could. Yet he was lying. He had discovered recently that the crippled little girl was wasting away. She was losing weight, coughing all day long. Death had claimed her. And the horrible thing was that Bella had realized all this, yet denied knowledge of it to her husband. And though both suspected the worst, they lied to each other because only lies could give them any hope.

Each day the news became more disquieting. Antwerp had been especially restless for some time. The Governor had raised the taxes, and the burghers by no means welcomed the new burden. Taxes had been high for some time, and it had seemed impossible that they could be increased further. Pieter, being free from taxation owing to his position as court painter, had no cause to worry on his own account; but his kinsmen and acquaintances in the commercial world spoke of little else. Everywhere there was grumbling, and the general discontent was undermining the popularity of the Archduke. Tension was particularly high in Brussels, and on one occasion a crowd of angry citizens disarmed and manhandled Spanish guards who had appeared to disperse it.

Three days after Clara's wedding Antwerp awoke to a strange sight: there were German soldiers in the streets. They molested no one but simply walked about in pairs. In front of the Town Hall there was a whole company of them. Pieter forbade the members of his household to go into the streets. When his father-in-law came to see him, he reproached

him for having taken the risk. "If there is a shower, you stay indoors; isn't it sensible to do the same when it might be raining bullets?"

"Don't be cross with me, Pieter. I was anxious about you, and I thought you might be able to explain these new developments."

They went up to the living room and discussed the political situation. As he had to be prepared for every possibility, the Archduke needed money. In eighteen months the armistice would have expired. The simple burgher who took little interest in politics might be annoyed by the increased taxation; but the person who knew anything of the forces at work was resigned to it as inevitable.

"We must accept the fact that for the time being mankind is a barbarian horde," remarked Pieter. "Force is still the chief law of society. Perhaps in a hundred thousand years a time will come when men will be content to live without preying on others. Nowadays every quarrel ends in violence—even street urchins tear each other's clothes. We must look upon this increased taxation as a way of paying for all this."

"And will it be always so? Is there nothing we can do about it?"

"It will always be so until the rich no longer rule the world."

Jan Brant stared incredulously at his son-in-law, thinking for a moment that his ears had betrayed him. He was a rich man himself, and Pieter, too, could now be considered as one. Pieter saw his astonishment and began to explain his views calmly and dispassionately.

"Listen, Father. I start from the premise that war is the greatest of evils. The man who murders another forfeits his own life; he who sets a house on fire runs the risk of heavy penalties. But, if either of these things happens to many men, it is condoned under the name of war. Why is this so? First, I should say, comes the rivalry of princes, princes who jealously guard the interests of their houses and their immense wealth. If anything threatens their prestige or their possessions they take recourse to war. And they are able to do this because they have strong supporters in the rich. Who are the people who want to terminate the armistice by war? You know as well as I that they are, first, the wealthy Spanish grandees, who feel that Dutch power threatens their interests in the East Indies, second, the States General of the Netherlands, who hold that the Dutch merchants, too, have the right to become rich, even at the expense of the Spanish. If you were to reckon up how many individuals are involved, you would be astonished. For every man who wants

war, there are a hundred thousand who don't. A cobbler has no interest in Dutch-Spanish commercial rivalry, nor does he care if the King of Bohemia has married the daughter of the King of England, or if the King of France has married the daughter of the King of Spain. A cobbler wants to mend boots so that he can feed his wife and children. He certainly doesn't want his house to be set on fire. And he knows quite well that if he protests too loudly he and his wife and family will be put to the sword. And why is all this? First, because the King of Spain has a hereditary right to the whole of the Low Countries; secondly, because one hundred or six hundred wealthy men are quarreling over the commerce of the East Indies. So you see, as I remarked before, war is made by the rich and suffered by the poor."

"All this sounds very plausible, my son. But it isn't true. Look beyond the borders. Both the Bohemians and the Hungarians are fighting for Protestantism. What commercial interests move Frederick or Gabriel Bethlen?"

"Forgive me, Father, but I do not care about them. The peace of Flanders is the only peace which interests me. Fate has decreed that we shall be a small and weak nation. So we can't stand on our own feet. We can only decide whether it is better to see Spanish or French soldiers patrol our streets. We have managed to live at peace with the Dutch for more than ten years. But now the peace is threatened, and Antwerp may one night be set on fire, though we have harmed no one. And why? Because the rich are fighting over their money. Let me repeat, if the common people ruled themselves and weren't ruled by the rich, there would be no war. The world is large; there is more than enough wheat for all; more than sufficient horses and cattle to graze in the meadows. Nothing is required but the will to allow each man to work for his own happiness and that of others. God gives every child the right not to starve. But the rich have seized the earth, and to increase their wealth they rob others."

"I don't understand you, Pieter. You speak like some crazy Savonarola. If there were no rich people in the world, who would buy your pictures? Don't you see that your wild talk cuts the ground from under your own feet?"

"No, sir, I do not. The world yields enough riches to provide even for artists. You are no longer young. Reflect how many houses have been

burned down, how many cornfields set afire in your lifetime. If we had the value of these, couldn't every beggar in Antwerp be made happy, and wouldn't the money pay for all the pictures I and my colleagues are ever likely to paint?"

"It's difficult to argue with you, Pieter. I am old and old-fashioned. I was brought up in the Christian belief that it is a man's duty to make enough money to live comfortably and provide for his family. But let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the rich really are the cause of war, what would you have us to do? Beat them to death?"

"No. Don't think me a barefooted apostle. I am not that. I don't want to incite anyone to disorder. I want to make enough money to provide for your daughter and give your grandchildren the best possible life. I don't approve of the extermination of the rich, because my house here on the Wapper would be plundered first. You ask me what is to be done. And I reply that we must wait, Father. We must wait until mankind becomes enlightened and ennobled. We must wait until everyone recognizes everyone else's right to life and happiness."

"And will we live to see that?"

"I don't think so. Not even the grandchildren of our grandchildren. But it is our duty to work for it. I myself try to show people a vision of ideal beauty. I am of no importance, but a thousand generations of teachers such as I am may achieve something."

"This sounds very praiseworthy, my son, but what has it to do with your grotesque philosophy?"

"The wise man dreams of the future, but places his feet firmly in the present. And if you are interested in the present I can give you some pleasant news. I have heard from Sir Dudley about the matter of my Dutch patent."

"Excellent. Have you succeeded?"

"Partly. The States General have passed a resolution refusing me a patent, as I am a native of a country with which Holland may shortly be at war, but also prohibiting any Dutch firm or individual from making engravings from my pictures for the next seven years. So I lose all income from Holland for some time to come, but I have the consolation that I cannot be cheated in that country. And in seven years the world may change a great deal; ultimately I may make a lot of money in the Netherlands."

"I am glad to hear you speaking like this. I feared you were about to give your money to the poor, dismiss your assistants, and don a friar's gown."

Pieter did not laugh, but sat pondering.

"That would be the Christian thing to do; but I am only human and I love my family. . . . Go and talk to Bella and the children. I am going downstairs to work."

"You are a curious fellow, Pieter. Strange soldiers are patrolling the streets in front of your house, and yet you are able to work."

"Of course. The soldiers will one day disappear, but my pictures will go on living."

VII

The German soldiers did indeed vanish from Flanders. The ill-tempered Archduke's display of force had its effect. The dispirited burghers approved the taxes one by one, and at last quiet was restored and the soldiers of the Holy Roman Empire were withdrawn. The garrison was once more supplied by the Spanish. And now no one in the city spoke of anything but the armistice which was so soon to expire. Everyone expected war.

Pieter and his father-in-law urged Jan Brant to begin his activities in The Hague. But a new and formidable obstacle arose. Old Brant was unable to travel to The Hague; the Dutch frontier was regularly guarded, and every wayfarer was carefully questioned about the reason for his journey. Some bright fellow might put two and two together and realize that Brant's son-in-law was court painter at Brussels, while his nephew was in the confidence of Prince Maurice. There was nothing for it but to rely on correspondence, the text of which was apparently innocent and which was carried by trusted couriers. Months passed before a reply arrived, and even then it was scarcely satisfactory. This greatly depressed Pieter, but neither he nor his father-in-law gave up hope that sooner or later Jan Brant would be able to persuade the Prince of Orange to make some definite reply.

Of all this no one knew, not even Bella. The life of the studio continued unchanged. Wildens had married, Vorsterman's child had been born, but that did not make the engraver any saner; he was still extremely nervous, rushed home several times a day, and interrupted his work for frequent prayer. Everything he turned out was a masterpiece, but he could not keep pace with the speed of this art factory. If Pieter scolded him, he made a scene, crying, pleading, cursing. He called Pieter his savior, himself the lowest scum on earth, vowed to mend his ways, but he soon forgot his good intentions and started the same farce all over again.

But Pieter found unmitigated joy in Anthony van Dyck. The young

man's adolescent and secret passion for Bella had faded, but his warm affection for the Rubens family remained. His work was not impaired by his numerous love affairs. He began to acquire a distinct reputation of his own. The wonderful new church of the Jesuits for which Pieter had designed a front some time before began to emerge under the builders' hands. The frescoes on the ceiling the Jesuits entrusted to him, just as they had commissioned his studio to paint the two huge altarpieces depicting Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier. But this time they wanted to include in the contract the name of Anthony van Dyck.

"You begin to catch up with me," Pieter told his favorite. "Soon your fame will be greater than mine."

Anthony smiled affectionately and gratefully. The relations between master and pupil remained untroubled. Pieter was without a trace of jealousy; he tried to further the young man's interest on every occasion, taking every opportunity to praise him; gave him the best commissions he was unable to execute himself; and, when important people came to the house, invited him, too. On the other hand, Anthony was not spoiled by this treatment and the flood of quick success; he looked upon his master with something approaching awe, deeply respecting his genius and craftsmanship. He retained his formal, reserved manner, and, even if the smallest apprentice asked him a question, he replied politely and with a ceremonious bow.

The most important person to whom his master introduced him was Sir Dudley Carleton, the British Ambassador at The Hague. Sir Dudley had already become interested in the young painter when he had exchanged his collection of antiques for the pictures. This interest became stronger and stronger, and Pieter did everything to strengthen it. But even so it sounded like a piece of incredible luck when the English diplomat one day sent a message through a friend of his who traveled to Antwerp: would young Van Dyck like to settle in London as the court painter of the King of England?

Anthony was no longer in love with Bella; there was no need to send him away from Antwerp. But Pieter strongly advised him to accept the offer.

"You mustn't hesitate, Anthony; this is an immense thing to happen to you. In a year you may become a world-famous painter. You don't know the importance of courts; I do. If I had had sense enough in

Mantua and not permitted myself to be used for copying, I'd have achieved what I have achieved ten years sooner. It will be a great loss for me if you go, but the fate of your talent is more important in my eyes. Don't brood over it too long; accept it."

"I'll think it over, sir."

"Don't make me angry, boy: what is there to think over? You're twenty-one and have been asked to become court painter to the King of England. I can't understand your hesitation."

"I have been told that there is a great deal of fog in London. I can't stand fog. It makes me cough and depresses me. Why should I be depressed all the time?"

"Millions endure the fog. You'll manage to bear it, too."

"Yes, but it's said that they don't know how to heat their rooms there and the houses are most uncomfortable. I love my house here. If I had to leave it I'd feel I was bound for the cemetery."

"First of all you can take your things with you. Secondly, it doesn't matter if you are a bit uncomfortable at the beginning. But think of the money! In such a position you can earn a whole fortune over and above your court pay. Look at me. I am only court painter to the Governor of Flanders. And you have been asked to become court painter to the King of England!"

Van Dyck shrugged his shoulders.

"But sir, I am a rich man; what need have I of money?"

"All right, then. Is fame nothing? Have you no ambition? Every real artist wants to have the largest possible public."

"Of course I have ambition. But I've been told that mutton is the constant fare in England. I hate mutton. If I ever see it in an inn or elsewhere, it upsets my stomach for days."

"One needs a great deal of patience to handle you, Anthony. I won't rest until you start for England. You know that I usually achieve what I set out to do. And I'm resolved to achieve this."

And Pieter neglected nothing to further the London trip of his pupil. About this time a distinguished friend of Sir Dudley Carleton's, the Earl of Arundel, arrived in Antwerp. He was passing through the city on his way to Brussels and asked Pieter to paint portraits of himself and of his wife. One day the Earl and his wife appeared in the studio to discuss terms. Thomas, Earl of Arundel, was a man of dignified appearance and

obviously conscious of his rank. His wife, too, was supercilious to a degree. She was dressed richly, and her skin was of a dazzling whiteness. They were accompanied by three members of their retinue—for the huge greyhound which entered the studio on the heels of its master could certainly be considered in that light. Of the other two, one was a bedizened dwarf, and the other the Earl's fool, attired in a particolored suit. Pieter received his guests with great politeness and then presented his collaborators one by one, leaving Anthony to the last.

"Allow me to present to Your Lordship my pupil Anthony van Dyck, of whom Sir Dudley has doubtless spoken to you already."

"Van Dyck? I am happy to make your acquaintance. Do you work regularly with Mynheer Rubens?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you show Her Ladyship and me some of your work?"

"Gladly, sir."

Anthony brought out some of his pictures, and the noble couple nodded their appreciation. They especially liked his St. Sebastian.

"Sir Dudley was not mistaken in your talent," remarked the Earl. "You must come to the English Court."

While Anthony expressed his gratitude, Pieter winked at him maliciously. Then the talk passed to the pictures Pieter was to paint.

"My secretary has already discussed the financial side of the matter," began His Lordship, "so there is no need to refer to that now. But I must tell you at once that my wife wishes the clown, the dwarf, and the dog to appear in the picture. We should like to be painted on a balcony with pillars."

"Your secretary also discussed that with me," said Pieter with a polite bow. "I understood that it was to be a group painting with five figures. Now I know what the five figures are to be, and I may say all of them will provide extremely interesting work. My friend Snijders, who loves to paint animals, will rejoice to have such a fine greyhound as a subject. And I myself am glad of the chance to paint the dwarf. I have painted ordinary men and women, lions, negroes, and giants, but never a dwarf. It only remains now to arrange the times of the sittings."

"The times of the sittings," echoed the Earl of Arundel. "I don't understand. Tomorrow we leave for Brussels. Surely you can sketch the faces

while we are here? You are famous for the speed at which you work. The rest does not require our presence."

The members of Pieter's staff were plainly startled; but not so Pieter.

"Just as you wish, Your Lordship. I will paint you and Her Ladyship at once, and there will be no need for you to pay me another visit. But I must beg you to send the clown, the dwarf, and the dog to me for some hours this afternoon."

The Earl turned anxiously to his wife and asked in English: "Can you do without them this afternoon?" Pieter interposed in English. "My Lady, I am sure you wish to pay some calls this afternoon with a pomp befitting your rank; but can you not excuse the absence of the dwarf, the clown, and the hound by saying that Rubens is painting them?"

"Quite a good idea," nodded the Countess, after a moment's thought. "I shall say that everywhere. So you speak English?"

"Badly, Your Ladyship. But I can make myself understood. Unfortunately, I have little chance of practicing my English."

"It is rare to find people on the Continent who speak our language. Now you are going to paint me?"

"With your permission, Your Ladyship."

Everything went smoothly. In a few seconds the easel, the dais, the armchair, the brushes, the colors, everything had been placed in position. With a few strokes Pieter suggested the outline of an open balcony with columns. The finished picture was already complete in his head. He saw clearly the groups of figures, each balancing the other, in perfect proportion. He had decided to place the woman in the middle; she wore a black dress, probably chosen to bring out the fineness of her skin. On the right there would be the husband, on the left the greyhound; in the foreground, the clown and the dwarf. To sketch the picture in outline took less than fifteen minutes. Pieter then led the Countess to the dais and begged her to be seated in the armchair.

"If you will turn slightly to the left, Your Ladyship. . . . Splendid! Now I can take full advantage of the light."

And he began to paint her face, which was chiefly remarkable, apart from the skin, for the prominent nose and somewhat rounded chin. He worked as if inspired. His eyes were filled with ecstasy and hate at the same time. He hated this face which put his talent to such a difficult test and yet adored it as an obstacle which his art had overcome. Work

stopped in the studio, his assistants watched him as if enchanted, in complete silence. Their faces expressed awe, an almost superstitious admiration.

"May I ask Your Lordship now?" Pieter interrupted the deep silence about an hour later.

The Earl of Arundel stepped behind his back.

"You're a wizard," he said amazed. "This is a finished picture, not a sketch. . . . I've never seen such painting."

"If Your Lordship would be kind enough," Pieter replied, without heeding the compliment. "Step up on the dais, please."

While quick hands removed the armchair and placed it in a position where Lady Arundel could watch him sketch her husband, Pieter selected the best pose for the Earl. He started work again, with a kind of aggressive tenacity. The Earl was also finished in an hour. The Countess cried out:

"Your nose, Tom . . . it's really amazing!"

She clapped her hands.

"Your ruff, Tom . . . one wouldn't believe it if one hadn't seen it. . . ."

At last Pieter left his easel and bowed to the Earl.

"I think the likeness is excellent, Mynheer Rubens," the Earl said. "But now tell me . . . how do you do it?"

"It's rather complicated, Your Lordship. I'll elaborate these two sketches in detail, as the dresses demand a careful presentation. But I have observed your clothes in every particular. The pose is the same as it will be on the canvas; I only need to modify the sketched outlines a little. These smaller pictures when finished will be transferred to the larger canvas. Today we shall do sketches of the other figures. We shall place a beautiful carpet beneath your feet, the background will consist of fine, richly carved columns with a curtain. The latter will show your coat of arms in the correct colors. I sincerely hope that you will be satisfied."

"And I'm sorry that we cannot spend more time in your company. I planned to have some friendly words with Mynheer van Dyck but now we really must go. I hope this won't be our last meeting—and I expect to see Mynheer van Dyck in London very soon. You can discuss the transport of the picture and the other details with my secretary. We shall send our retinue to you this afternoon."

Pieter accompanied his guests to the gate. Then he sat down for a few

minutes and listened to his assistants who were standing in front of the sketches, admiring them. But in ten minutes Pieter rose.

"Let's get on with our work, children; this won't bring us in any money. Give me the Latona picture."

Anthony stared at his master.

"Do you mean to go on, sir, after such exhausting work? Aren't you tired?"

"I am a little. But that is no reason for stopping work. Come on, lads, everyone to his task."

Pieter continued work till his usual lunch time, came back in half an hour, and started work again. In the afternoon the clown, the greyhound, and the dwarf turned up as promised. Snijders started on the dog; Pieter sketched the clown and the dwarf. He changed his tools often when he had to work hard. He had discovered at an early age that if you are tired of the brush you can always continue with chalk or pen. So he made the sketches in pen and ink, but took exact notes of the colors and other details required. In the meantime, he urged on the apprentices, who were apt to stare instead of working. But he did not insist, as he had no wish to rob them of their amusement. The fool talked all the time; but, as he spoke only English and a few words of dog-Latin, no one understood him. Still, he laughed a great deal, and the boys laughed with him. When the sketches were finished, the clown and the dwarf turned a few cartwheels. The dwarf, whose stunted body was topped by a handsome and well-proportioned head, showed the apprentices how to walk on their hands.

The studio was flourishing, its standing was firmly established, the best commissions came to the Rubens workshop. The Jesuits, Minorites, and other orders gave it their more serious work, as did the larger Flemish churches; the Duke of Zweibrücken-Neuburg and other rich dignitaries continued to order new pictures; Prince Ahremberg ordered a picture of the Savior for a Brussels church, and Rockox ordered a Crucifixion. Pieter's better-known fellow painters also came to ask for help, especially Breughel, who knew that his own strength lay in the landscape work; he asked Pieter to paint most of his larger human figures. Pieter was now in a position to increase his prices considerably. He calculated his fees according to the length of time spent on a picture. If his more fastidious clients insisted that the picture should be his work alone, he charged

in accordance with the same system, but on a much higher scale. He expected one hundred guilders for one day's work. If he spent a month on a picture, he charged two thousand five hundred guilders—not reckoning Sundays, and on the understanding that he continued to take part in the ordinary work of the studio at the same time. And even this did not deter clients. Indeed, although living was becoming a more and more expensive business, he never lacked commissions. The world was restless. While Flanders tottered on the brink of war, blood was already flowing elsewhere.

Pieter and his father-in-law had still not given up hope of establishing more reliable contacts with Jan Brant, who was in turn to bring Prince Maurice and Peckius together. Their recent correspondence with young Brant indicated that the Prince was showing no great desire to parley with the Brussels authorities. He made promises, prevaricated, and remained cautious and skeptical. So the conversations between Pieter and old Brant tended to be academic rather than practical. There was always plenty of news to discuss. On both Bohemian and Hungarian soil war was raging with redoubled fury. Frederick clung stubbornly to the throne of Bohemia in spite of the Emperor's violent opposition. Meanwhile the Transylvanian leader, Bethlen, had had himself elected King of Hungary. The House of Hapsburg was engaged in a mortal struggle. And the leading question became: would the outcome turn to the advantage of the Catholic or the Protestant constituent states of the Empire? The question was unanswerable, because no one knew whether some petty prince might not disturb the whole disposition of forces by going over to the other side in an effort to serve his own interests. A single principality, the very name of which might be unknown to the ordinary man, might cause endless complications. The attitude of the French Court was also uncertain, its policy vacillating. Louis XIII had become reconciled to his mother, Maria Medici. The son followed a Huguenot policy; the mother turned toward Catholic Spain. But what policy did the reconciled mother and son, taken together, represent? The power behind the throne was a man called Richelieu, who, it was said, would soon receive a cardinal's hat. In Brussels he was said to be a remarkably skillful politician, whose chief aim was to keep every door open. The King's favorite was De Luynes, but the wily Richelieu kept in the good graces of both the King and the Queen Mother, and intrigued for his own ad-

vancement. It was one of Europe's mysteries what policy he would follow when he judged himself strong enough to take an independent line.

"You are not interested in politics?" Pieter asked Van Dyck.

"No, sir. I am not interested in subjects outside my sphere. I know nothing of politics, so I am not interested in them."

"But doesn't the issue of peace or war interest you?"

"That should rather concern my father, sir. He is a rich man and anxious about his ships. But no matter what happens, I think I shall be spared enough of this world's goods to preserve me from poverty."

"But what if the Dutch armies march into Antwerp? What do you propose to do then?"

"What should I do if lightning struck our house? What should I do? Why I should probably fly to you. But, if your fears materialize, I shall be in a most unfortunate position, for I hate noise, excitement, and disorder."

"Haven't you made up your mind yet about going to England?"

"To be frank, sir, the prospect no longer seems so unattractive to me. I have recently heard some English folk songs. They enchanted me. And I am told that in England grass has quite a different color from the grass in Flanders: it is, apparently, fresher and greener. I don't deny that these things interest me. But I am still unable to make up my mind."

At last, when the official invitation arrived, he came to a decision. King James of England invited Anthony van Dyck to become his court painter. Pieter thought it time to speak seriously to the young man. There was, however, no need for much persuasion. Anthony had rushed to the opposite extreme and was now quite delighted by the prospect. His sisters helped him to prepare for the trip; he purchased several new suits, and his luggage was sufficient for five men. The day before his departure he appeared in Pieter's private rooms with his father. The latter was a pleasant gentleman, smooth mannered and obviously accustomed to the ways of the great world. He adored his son and expressed at great length his gratitude to Pieter. When father and son left, Pieter felt an unexpected emptiness. Later, when he and Bella were preparing to go to bed, he said:

"That boy is still in Antwerp, but I already miss him."

"I shall miss him, too. The children were fond of him, and the studio won't be the same without him."

"Oh, I am not thinking of that," said Pieter. "When I persuaded him to go, I knew that I was facing a serious financial loss. But I had grown very fond of him, and I took great delight in his talent. Both Snijders and Wildens are good men, but they cannot be compared with him. Vorsterman is almost unbearable."

"Have you much trouble with him?"

"Endless. He is completely irresponsible. Sometimes he behaves like a madman, and next day he kisses my hand and with tears in his eyes asks my forgiveness. And I do forgive him because I'm afraid he will jump into the Scheldt if I don't. His work is excellent, but impossibly slow. Anthony was different, and I don't know where I shall find another like him. I have recently taken little Joost van Egmont as an apprentice, and he is quite a clever little fellow. But there is only one Anthony. Oh, well, I mustn't be selfish. He has gone, and soon he will be world-famous."

Bella looked at her husband, her eyes shining.

"Oh, how glad I am that there is no trace of jealousy or envy in you. They say that you love money, and I'm glad to hear it, because it's good for me and the children. But I know that you love something more than money: talent."

"It is true, Bella. There is no more interesting thing than talent in the whole world. And to me it remains interesting, no matter in whom I discover it. It would be splendid if I could devote my life entirely to nourishing my own talent and watching that of others. But unfortunately the wickedness of the world makes it necessary for me to think of other things as well."

"War?"

"Yes. And the thought of it fills me with fury. So much so that I fall into the fault of the warmongers themselves and long to injure someone. Why can't human beings work in peace? Why do they persist in running swords through one another? Why do they burn one another's houses, destroying in a moment the possessions men have spent years in acquiring? No one can answer these questions. I have lived for forty-three years, and never yet have I had a glimmer of the truth. I am slowly beginning to think that there is no answer. I merely feel my responsibility as a human being. I feel I ought to do something to prevent such things from happening. But what can one man do? There is nothing more terrible than helplessness."

They often talked like this. It was in vain that Bella tried to soothe him. On this one point he remained profoundly pessimistic. The horror of the approaching war had, indeed, become a fixed idea with him. The news remained depressing, increasingly so. Soon after Anthony's departure it became known that the army fighting against the Hapsburgs was close to Vienna. At the same time the Emperor was marching against Prague to settle accounts with Frederick. Pieter could not restrain his impatience and went to Brussels to seek reliable information. Peckius told him that the army besieging Vienna had been much weakened by cold and hunger; meanwhile the Emperor Ferdinand had decisively beaten Frederick's army outside Prague. In his effort to restore order, Ferdinand was mercilessly executing one Protestant leader after another. Frederick was said to have fled to Holland with the intention of placing himself under the protection of the States General. He had left behind him hills of corpses, carcasses of frozen horses, starving mercenaries, and blood, blood everywhere. And in less than five months the armistice would expire.

"Are you not horrified by the thought of war, Your Excellency?"

"No. I have resigned myself to it. War is unavoidable. I'll try one last expedient; I'll ask twice as much as I want at the armistice; perhaps I shall get half of it. But I doubt it."

"I'm deeply ashamed that I haven't been able to help in spite of all my efforts."

"I think it would have been a waste of time to continue. The center of gravity has shifted once more; the influence of Prince Maurice is waning; that of the States General is growing. And according to the reports they, too, are determined on war, as well as the Spanish Court. Only we, the Brussels government, cling to our unhappy desire for peace. And we must hide our desire in order not to provoke the anger of Valladolid."

"Is His Highness unable to change this resolve of Spain?"

"That's a futile question, Rubens. You know quite well that the Court is ruled by commercial interests. Can commerce ever be persuaded to act against its interests? Money is blind and bloodthirsty. His Highness can do less now than ever. Don't tell anyone that I told you: His Highness is seriously ill. Don't apply for an audience; it's impossible. Her Highness doesn't grant any audiences either on account of her husband's state."

"You alarm me, Your Excellency. Is it grave?"

"Very grave. We don't know what his ailment is. He may last for months, but there's practically no hope. We are plunged in all this trouble and have no leader. . . . We can't do anything except wait for the unavoidable. Go home, Rubens, and pray for a miracle."

Pieter returned to Antwerp greatly disturbed in mind. He could do nothing except wait and pray. All Antwerp did the same.

And now one great figure on the world's stage died after another. The first to pass away was the Pope. The Cardinals elected Cardinal Ludovici; some said because they wanted a weak and sickly man who would postpone the clash of the strong parties, without interfering too much with them. The aged Pope, who adopted the name of Gregory XV, took for his chief adviser his young Jesuit nephew. No one knew whether this young man really wished to stop the threatened conflagration or considered it in the interest of the Church to feed the flames. Chancellor Peckius went to The Hague to discuss the armistice. He did not ask for a prolongation of it, but merely for a declaration that the Netherlands recognized Spanish suzerainty. But the States General affirmed defiantly and solemnly the full independence of their country. Only a fortnight of the armistice remained. And the day before it expired the bells began to toll in Antwerp: Philip III, King of Spain, had died.

The Antwerp churches were crowded. Forty thousand men asked in deep anxiety: what would the new King bring them?

VIII

It was impossible to bear Vorsterman's behavior any longer. He stayed away from the studio, neglected his work; the sale of engravings completely stopped. By now he was definitely hostile.

"Don't nag at me," he told Pieter when the latter reproached him for the fifth time because of the same fault. "You ought to be thankful that I copy your pictures."

Pieter could hardly believe his ears.

"What do you mean? *I* should be thankful?"

"Certainly. People buy the engravings for my sake, not for yours. What is good in them is my work. No one wants your smug priggish pictures. Someone had to tell you sooner or later. You're a bad painter, do you understand? You're mediocre! Mediocre!"

As he screamed this, his whole body trembled; his face was like a madman's. Pieter recoiled a little and stared at him. But the engraver bent forward and went on abusing him. Pieter controlled his temper.

"Don't provoke me, my friend. Take your things and go. I don't want to see you again in this studio."

"I'll be glad to go. I curse the hour when I first came here."

He went to collect his things, burst into tears, and sobbed over the table. The others watched him, horrified. No one could understand the scene. Pieter left the studio; he did not want to be present when the man staggered out. He told Bella, rather listlessly, what had happened.

"What? He called you mediocre? You of all people?"

"Yes. And the strange thing is that he made me think."

"But for God's sake, Pieter, you can't take seriously what such a fool says in anger. . . . He might just as well have called you a murderer or a thief."

"That's just it. He didn't call me a murderer. He called me smug, priggish, and mediocre. These were the words that came to his tongue; he had no need to think them. It must have been his opinion all the time. I *had* to discover that there was a man going about in Antwerp who was

really convinced that I was mediocre. He's blurted out his opinion. . . . But perhaps others think the same without blurting it out. . . . No, my dear, don't contradict me, let me think it out. I have kept calm, but I must digest this. . . ."

He went into the next room and shut the door. The man had called him mediocre. Until now he had thought that no one would dare to make such a statement—and yet it had happened. Had Aristotle ever been called stupid and ignorant by some dismissed servant? Pieter considered it hardly likely. Not even a man who was out of his mind, foaming at the mouth, could call Aristotle stupid. But he himself had been called mediocre. So his authority, his fame, was smaller than that of Aristotle. But was authority a certain standard of talent? No. There was, for instance, that man Pomerancio with whom he had had those painful scenes in Rome. He enjoyed considerable authority and respect, and yet at the best his was a mediocre talent. But what was the measure of talent? Success? No. Mediocrities often surpassed in popularity real men of genius. Or was it the judgment of experts? No, they might be wrong or hide the truth out of politeness. Oh, no, there was no outside help here; everybody had to submit to the judgment of his inner voice if he wanted to form an opinion of his talent. . . . And what could he, Pieter Paul Rubens, do about the matter? Nothing. He must go on working and leave the rest to God.

He avoided Bella, who was with the children, and returned to the studio. Vorsterman had already gone. Snijders stepped forward and cleared his throat:

"We have decided, Pieter, to tell you how angry we are at Vorsterman's insolence. We want to protest against his rascally ingratitude. You are the kindest possible master, and there is not one among us who doesn't owe a debt of gratitude to you."

"Thank you, Frans; the whole matter is unimportant, don't worry about it. But what do you say to the statement that I am mediocre?"

"We all know," smiled Snijders a little shyly, "that you are the master of masters. It would be silly to discuss the matter."

Pieter, too, smiled. And he asked in a light, superficial tone:

"But could anyone have called Aristotle a stupid man?"

"A madman like Vorsterman could call anybody anything. We all think the unhappy fellow must be mad. I want to warn you against him.

When he left, he shook his fist toward your windows. A lunatic like that may be dangerous."

"Thank you, Frans, for telling me, but I'm not afraid of him. If he's mad, he will calm down. If he isn't, I can deal with him. I wish he were my greatest worry. What's the news in the streets?"

"No disorders—small crowd in front of the Town Hall waiting for news. The churches are all full on account of the King's death. But someone is certain to come along and tell us if anything happens. Here, someone's coming now. . . ."

There were always visitors to the studio who brought interesting news. A tall, thin young man entered, Ringout, the Brussels representative of Maximilian, the Duke of Bavaria. He had recently paid Pieter three thousand guilders for two pictures for his master, and now, passing through Antwerp, he thought it his duty to call. He had hardly closed the door when a new caller knocked—David Teniers, a rather second-rate landscape painter who had come to ask Pieter's help in some business with the St. Luke Guild. They began to talk about the war. Ringout had some relations in Valtellina, and he was able to give details about the recent massacre there. A Capuchin monk had organized the movement; following a prearranged plan, Catholic conspirators had stolen at midnight into the town of Tirano, rung all the church bells; and, when the Protestant burghers rushed from their houses to see what was the trouble, had fallen upon them. Practically the whole population of the town had been massacred. The Protestant rule in Graubünden was ended; since that bloody night the Austrians had occupied part of Graubünden from Tyrol, while the Spaniards had marched in from Milan. Hundreds of houses had been set afire on the mountains. There could hardly be any doubt about the plans of Spain; the new King, Philip IV, was only fifteen, and thus no change in policy could be expected. Spain wanted war, and war was coming tomorrow. It was the eighth of April today, the day before the expiration of the armistice.

"What's going to happen here, Mynheer? Should I send away my family?"

"I can't give you any definite advice. But I'll tell you what I'm going to do and why."

"I should be grateful if you would."

"I've spoken to many people both here and in Brussels. I don't think

it likely that the Dutch will attack us. They want their independence and don't want to fight. And, even if Prince Maurice were to set out with his mercenaries, his strategy wouldn't lead him in this direction. Both sides are looking for small and easily occupied territories. The first step for the Spaniards is Jülich. They are certain to seize it and make the present situation secure for the Catholic side. It isn't we who are important now but the German towns; that's where the battles are to be expected. So I'm going to stay on—I don't think any trouble is coming this way for a considerable time. Of course, war is spreading. God grant that it may avoid Antwerp. The illness of the Archduke is a serious blow for us. He loves Antwerp greatly and loves peace even more."

"What is the latest news of His Highness?"

"Not good, unfortunately. Our only consolation is that if God calls him away we shall still have the Archduchess, who is a good and kind woman, devoted to peace."

Ringout's information proved correct. The next day the armistice expired, and once more everyone lived in a state of war, although there was no outward sign of the change. An excited crowd of citizens assembled outside the Town Hall, but Rockox reassured them, and they drifted back to their homes. Business went on as usual, although people wore black for the Spanish King; dancing was forbidden at the inns, and one Mass followed another. But the people were far from being reassured by the quiet; rumors spread with lightning speed. The names of new generals emerged: a Czech general called Wallenstein in the service of the Emperor was often mentioned, and also Mansfeld, a Protestant. A Flemish soldier who had taken the name of Tilly was also spoken of. The almost forgotten name of Spinola was heard again. The news spoke of the marchings of these leaders, the plundering of their mercenaries, the spilling of blood; but still Antwerp was not threatened.

The death struggle of the Archduke lasted for weeks. But at last, on a summer day, the news came that after much suffering he had joined his ancestors. He was given a funeral befitting his rank. The long stream of carriages and horsemen traveling from Antwerp to Brussels to join the funeral testified to the Archduke's popularity. At the ceremony Pieter, as court painter, was given a special place. He watched with a painter's eye the scene of somber pomp. He, like everyone else, was astonished to

see the Archduchess Isabella enter the church attired in the robes of a sister of the Clarissa Order of nuns.

The remaining death which greatly affected Pieter was that of old Van Dyck. He had been ailing almost continuously since his son's departure for England, but he had neglected to send Anthony word of his condition. He knew that King James had received his son with the greatest consideration and had granted him an annuity of a hundred pounds a year. Young Van Dyck often wrote to Pieter, and once he mentioned that the Earl of Arundel had commissioned a portrait from him. Pieter and his father often met to discuss these letters, and he had for some time feared the old man could not live much longer. At last Anthony was sent for, but when he arrived his father had been dead and buried for some days.

Van Dyck mourned his father deeply, and for a long time seemed paralyzed by the blow. But his reaction was different from Pieter's on the death of his mother: he did not shun society but courted it, especially men who had known his father and with whom he could exchange memories. At last he recovered sufficiently to discuss painting and London with his former master. He spoke of his success at the English Court; he had received one commission after another, and his prices had risen with his fame.

"How much money have you brought home?"

"Nothing," Van Dyck replied in surprise. "Life in London is extremely expensive. My two valets cost me a fortune, and I have had to employ a third because the other two speak nothing but English. Tailors, too, are very costly."

"Tailors? But you took a wardrobe sufficient for five men."

"Yes, but fashions are different in lots of ways in England, and I did not want to be ashamed of my appearance at Court. Life over there is intolerably expensive, I can tell you."

"But, everything considered, you are comfortable enough?"

"Yes. I shall certainly return when my leave has expired—it lasts for eight months. I shall have plenty to do. The winding up of my father's estate, especially will take time. But I should like to work in your studio as before, if you are agreeable. I am having a studio built in my own house—alas, there is room for one now."

"How long will it take to build?"

"About three months."

"But you have already been a month in Antwerp; that will leave only four months during which you can use it. Is it worth while?"

"I am keeping on the house, although I live most of the time abroad. It would be remarkable indeed if my house had no studio."

"You are incorrigible, Anthony, but I have no intention of interfering with your plans. I can, in any case, promise you commissions while you are here. Next week I am to have an audience with the Archduchess, and I shall recommend you to her."

The Infanta Isabella had expressly asked that Pieter should visit her. She had now officially taken over the Regency, and she was resolved to retain the services of all those men whom her husband had favored. As an audience room she used Albrecht's study. Pieter found her sitting at her late husband's desk, attired in a nun's habit.

"It is a great comfort to me to see you, Rubens. First I want to thank you for your letter; I have received many expressions of condolence, but few touched my heart as deeply as yours."

"It touched your heart, Your Highness, because it came from my heart."

"I know. And I also know how much my poor husband loved and esteemed you. Shortly before his death, we spoke of the more trustworthy people at Court, and he recommended you most warmly to me. His words were: 'You can trust that man.' I tell you this so that you should know and be proud of it."

"I am deeply touched, Your Highness. My master has sent me praise from beyond the grave, and that is a great consolation to me."

"Yes, these are sad times, Rubens. But perhaps I shouldn't say so, as we are winning. Have you heard of Tilly's new victory?"

"No, Your Highness."

"Under Spinola's command, he attacked Regensburg until the Winter King. . . . You know the nickname, don't you?"

"Of course, Your Highness. It was given to Frederick because he ruled in Prague for only a few winter months."

"Well, the Emperor is winning the Palatinate from the Winter King. Tilly has taken Regensburg; and yet I agree with you that these are sad times. I wish I knew why men must always fight each other. I know how much you hate war. Peckius has told me what pains you took to prevent it before the armistice expired."

"To my great humiliation, Your Highness, my efforts were fruitless."

"You must not lose heart. I have received reports of your kinsman, Jan Brant. He is a trustworthy man. It isn't his fault if he has been unable to effect anything. Prince Maurice is to blame—of that I am certain. The Prince is cunning, cautious, and not very honest. But the more difficult the task, the more glorious. I beg you not to relax your efforts, Rubens. We have connections with all the more important men of the States General, but none with the Prince. Don't give up what you have begun."

"I thank you for your trust, Your Highness. I will do everything in my power."

"I expect much of you. Indeed, there are matters I dare to discuss only with you. In future you must come more frequently to Brussels. You are probably acquainted with Count Warfusee; he is in supreme charge of the finances of the Spanish Netherlands. Frankly, I doubt his integrity. I always think of my poor brother, whom the Duke of Lerma robbed for years. Tell me, what do you know of Count Warfusee? Is he a thief or isn't he?"

"Your Highness knows what a grave responsibility I assume in answering. Yes, Count Warfusee is a thief."

"Bring me proof."

"I shall, Your Highness."

"Then there is Hendrik van Bergh, the Spanish general."

"Yes, Your Highness, he is just as bad. And I shall bring proof in his case as well."

"I shall be infinitely obliged. I am determined to rid myself of these fellows. The other day I saw Spinola. It was painful to listen to him: he spoke so frankly. He told me my poor husband believed everyone to be as honest as himself. And many people abused his trust and in that way injured the country. You must help me. And I know that you will do so unselfishly. Although, as I shall show in a moment, unselfishness can also be profitable. You know of the recent doings of Maria Medici?"

"I know that Richelieu has reconciled the Queen Mother to her son. She has been permitted to return to Paris."

"Yes, that is so. The King has installed her in Luxembourg. There is a huge gallery in that palace, divided into several sections. Maria, my kinswoman, has decided to decorate it with pictures, and I have decided that it is you who must paint them."

"Oh, Your Highness, if only I could obtain such a commission."

"Well, listen. My Ambassador in Paris is Baron de Vicq. He is in Brussels now, but soon he will leave the French capital to take up his post. Go to him at once and make friends with him. I shall discuss everything in detail with him."

The Archduchess rang a bell and instructed the courtier who entered to arrange an immediate meeting between Baron de Vicq and Rubens. She then dismissed Pieter very warmly. He hurried to the Ambassador. The Baron had already been informed of the plan, but did not think it likely to succeed.

"If we fail, I shall nevertheless value your good will, Your Excellency," said Pieter. "Allow me to make some return for it now."

"How?" asked the Baron surprised.

"Will you allow me to paint your portrait?"

"It is a very generous offer. You embarrass me. I do not know whether I can accept it. And I have no time to go to Antwerp."

"There is no need for that, Your Excellency. I shall paint it here. My good friend, Jan Breughel, has a studio here at Court. If you like, we can do it today."

The Ambassador did not need much persuasion, and the portrait was begun that day. De Vicq was overjoyed. He was by no means a rich man, yet he had received a princely gift. Pieter could be certain that he would do everything in his power to help him in Paris.

At home he immediately called his father-in-law and Rockox to a secret conference. When he told them of his audience with the Archduchess, they were both overjoyed.

"Pieter," Rockox cried, "you'll be the savior of Flanders if you rid us of these thieves."

"We'll get all the proof," old Brant said.

A few weeks later Pieter read with amazement the thick bundle of documents prepared for him: the list of the crimes which the distinguished robbers had committed. There were many other names whose bearers were also involved in the abuses. Pieter at once took them to Brussels. While he stood in the anteroom of the audience chamber, a panting man pushed him aside.

"I've important things to discuss with Her Highness," he said. "You can wait."

It was none other than Count Warfusee. He did not stay long. When he reappeared in the anteroom, he said condescendingly to Pieter, "Now you may go in." And in he went with the proofs of Warfusee's dishonesty under his arm. He presented the documents silently to the Archduchess. Her Highness glanced through them quickly.

"Where did you obtain this information?"

"If you insist on knowing, Your Highness, of course I shall tell you. But, if the man's name becomes known to you, I shall be unable to get any further information out of him."

"You are right, Rubens. His name is not important, but only what is written here. And now just one moment. I am curious to see whether the matter Warfusee has just come to consult me about is mentioned in these documents. . . . Yes, here it is. The building of the Scheldt dams. Incredible. And how long has this been going on? I am deeply grateful to you, Rubens. I shall go through these papers most carefully. Now I want to tell you that De Vicq has been here for a farewell audience and has already set out for Paris. He said he would do anything he could for you. You have certainly won a warm place in his affections. If you obtain the Paris commissions, you must keep your eyes open and report to me every court matter of importance. Why are you smiling?"

"Your Highness, I do not wish to be guilty of disrespect. . . . But I cannot help observing that just as my unselfishness brings its reward, so your favors to me are useful to you, for you can hardly hope to obtain more authentic reports of affairs in Paris than I shall be able to supply."

"You are a clever dog, Rubens. You see I am smiling, too. . . . Have you any acquaintances in Paris, by the way?"

"Yes, Your Highness. If I go there I plan to visit a famous scholar who is a relative of mine—Hugo Grotius."

"Oh, is he in Paris? I had heard that he had been arrested in The Hague."

"Yes, Your Highness, he is in Paris. Together with Olden-Barnevelt he was sentenced to death. But he managed to escape. His wife smuggled him out of prison in a chest, and he fled to France."

"Have your efforts to make contact with The Hague met with any success?"

"Yes, Your Highness. My father-in-law has received a verbal message

that Prince Maurice does not reject out of hand the principle of discussions with Spain."

"Indeed. This is great news. Why didn't you mention it before? Tell me everything in detail."

"There are no details, Your Highness. The Prince has simply expressed his willingness to answer any questions we may wish to put to him, without the knowledge of the States General."

"There is only one question. How can a new armistice be concluded? We cannot make a peace, because to do that would involve Spanish recognition of Netherlands independence. And that is impossible. We can only enter into an armistice as we did in 1609. It is essential to know what view Prince Maurice would take of our terms, which you know so well."

"Certainly, Your Highness. I shall redouble my efforts, and perhaps I shall soon have good news for you."

Pieter was now impatient to hear what De Vicq had been able to achieve in Paris. He heard first that the Baron had broached the subject to the Queen Mother, who had replied noncommittally but had expressed a liking for Rubens's work. That was a good sign. Pieter began to prepare for the trip. He still accepted commissions, but refused to give a definite date for their completion, and did not undertake to paint all the pictures himself. He told Van Dyck that he might have to leave Antwerp some time soon and would therefore like to know what plans Anthony had for the future.

"I have changed my mind, sir," replied the young man. "I am not returning to England."

"You are giving up your splendid post?" Pieter asked, astonished.

"You yourself told me that you ought to have returned to Mantua, where you were court painter, yet you did not return. So if you have to leave Antwerp for a time, go with an easy mind and leave everything to me. We ought to have another collaborator, I think. What about Moermans? He is not a great artist, but he is a sound craftsman and will be able to tackle the less skilled work."

"Moermans? Oh yes, the fellow who wants to marry the Schut girl. Well, I must say I am glad to hear you are staying; but at the same time I beg you to remember that any experience abroad is extremely useful in our profession."

"I have not forgotten that. But next time I travel it will be to Italy."

When definite word came that the Queen Mother had decided to commission Pieter to paint the pictures she required, he completed his preparations hurriedly. He needed passports, a suitable wardrobe; he had to make provision for both Philips's and Blandine's families. He discussed in detail with his father-in-law the political possibilities at The Hague. Just before he left Antwerp, he received an interesting piece of news. Count Oliva, who as Spanish Ambassador Extraordinary had rendered great services to Antwerp, had been sentenced to death, deprived of all his possessions, and executed because of his complicity in some political scandal. Thus the picture which Pieter had originally painted for the Antwerp Town Hall, and which had later been given to Oliva, was now the property of the King of Spain. Before his departure Rockox gave him a list of rare books and archaeological questions which Pieter was to discuss with Peiresc.

"I want to warn you," Rockox said. "The engraver you lately dismissed is telling everyone that you have ruined his life. He is doing everything he can to harm you. It would be well to silence him."

"I have no way of doing so. If people are prepared to believe him rather than me, there is nothing I can do about it."

One December morning Pieter kissed and embraced his wife and family and left Antwerp for Paris by stagecoach, for he had no wish to endure the discomforts of horseback in midwinter.

For some days he jolted over icy roads, clad in several fur coats, his feet encased in heavy cloth boots. At last on a dull afternoon Paris with her dark houses opened before him under a gray sky. After he had unpacked at an expensive inn, he at once hurried to the house of the Ambassador. After greetings had been exchanged, De Vicq came at once to the point.

"Everything has gone well till recently, my friend. But now our troubles are starting. You will be aware of the rather uncertain relations between the King and his mother. They are taking every opportunity to display the warmth of their feelings, yet they are childishly jealous of each other. Today is Monday. The Queen Mother has fixed your first audience for Thursday. But I have also reported to the King that you are coming and asked permission to present you. He seemed glad to have the opportunity of meeting you and set your audience for Wednesday. The situation is this: that, although you have been summoned to Paris by the Queen

Mother, you have to report to the King first. That is extremely embarrassing, and I see no way out of the difficulty."

"We shall get around it somehow. There are still two days till Wednesday. But first I should have a look at Luxembourg so as to be able to discuss the pictures with the Queen Mother. And I suppose Her Majesty is sure to have a chamberlain with whom I can discuss such matters as the cost of transporting the picture, as well as my traveling expenses."

"The Abbé de Maugis, priest of St. Ambrose Parish, is the man you should see. He is always at the palace."

"I shall visit him today. Apart from this matter of the pictures, I have to see Hugo Grotius, the jurist, and State Councilor Peiresc. I should be greatly obliged if you would help me to find these two gentlemen."

"Gladly. If you wish, we can go to the Abbé at once."

The Luxembourg was a huge place with an unimposing façade. Its beauty did not become apparent until Pieter entered the courtyard. The single room in which the Abbé lived, whose only ornament was a black Cross hung on the whitewashed wall, looked like a servant's room compared with the extravagant luxury of the rest of the palace. The Abbé was a small and extremely fat man, with a face round and red as an apple.

"I must tell you frankly," began the Abbé, "that I was against your employment. I considered that Her Majesty should entrust this work to a French artist. But I tell you just as frankly that I was unable to suggest a suitable man to Her Majesty, so I acquiesced in your appointment, and I now am glad of it. But first I should like to know your terms for these pictures."

"I cannot say, Your Reverence, for I have no idea of their size. I must see the gallery first. But tell me, is Her Majesty usually in the palace at this time?"

"Yes. She is now receiving the ladies of the Court."

"Of course. Her Majesty will have no time to see a humble painter who appears out of his turn?"

"None at all," remarked the Abbé coolly. "Her Majesty has already fixed the time for your audience."

"That is so, father. But this honor is such a great event to me that I find it extremely hard to wait until Thursday. It is even hard to wait until Wednesday, when I pay my humble respects to His Majesty. But I realize

that I must have patience, though my sole wish was to kiss Her Majesty's hand."

"Wait a moment," interposed the Abbé in ill-concealed surprise. "You say the King is to see you before the Queen Mother?"

"Yes, father. But His Majesty would hardly have fixed the audience for Wednesday if he had known that the Queen Mother wasn't to receive me before then."

The Abbé stroked his bald head, deep in thought.

"I see," he said at last. "Well, now I will take you to see the galleries."

They entered an immense hall, the hugeness of which, however, was somewhat mitigated by a gallery running round it. After a few moments the Abbé excused himself, saying he had urgent business to attend to. He returned in ten minutes.

"I have just spoken to Her Majesty. She sees no objection to His Excellency the Baron presenting Monsieur Rubens to her now."

He led them to an anteroom where several elderly ladies were waiting. In a few minutes a lady came out of the Queen Mother's room, and the Abbé told Rubens and De Vicq to follow him. In the little room Maria Medici was sitting. Pieter saw a woman with several chins. A great rope of pearls spread over her bosom; diamond earrings dangled from her ears.

"Your Majesty, I am most grateful for the favor of being permitted to present Pierre Paul Rubens," said De Vicq.

The Queen Mother stretched out her hand to both gentlemen to be kissed and then turned to Pieter.

"I am glad to receive you, monsieur. You did well to call at such an unusual time. You seem to be a clever man."

"It was not cleverness, but loyalty to the Medicis, Your Majesty. For many years I was court painter to Your Majesty's sister, the Duchess of Mantua."

"This is interesting. Will you tell the Marquise to be patient for a moment, De Maugis? So you were court painter at Mantua? At what time?"

"From 1600 to 1608, Your Majesty. I had the honor to be present in Florence on the occasion of Your Majesty's wedding. I can still see in my mind's eye the enchanting bride, the beautiful gown. . . ."

"Yes, that gown. We must have a long talk. Baron de Vicq, I thank

you greatly for recommending this artist. Unfortunately I have no time for further talk now. Adieu till Thursday, messieurs."

Pieter and De Vicq once more kissed her hand and bowed themselves from the room. They then returned to the Abbé's chamber to discuss financial matters. Pieter presented a list of his traveling expenses. Then the Abbé asked what would be the price of the pictures. Pieter said that there was room in the gallery for eighteen large pictures, and that his price was twenty thousand talers.

"How much?" The Abbé was startled.

"Twenty thousand talers, father. His Excellency will tell you that this is lower than my usual price. But, if you find the sum too large, put the matter before Her Majesty. As she comes from Florence, where the money value of painting is well known, she will be able to judge how reasonable my figure is."

For appearance's sake the Abbé tried to bargain. But Pieter remained immovable. He offered to hand the commission over to a pupil of his named Van Dyck, who would paint the pictures for ten thousand talers. The Abbé shrugged his shoulders and agreed to pay the twenty thousand. As they were leaving, De Vicq said:

"Believe me, Reverend Father, you have made a good bargain. The pictures will be worth it. I know Monsieur Rubens's work, and I have sufficient knowledge to say that he is a very great master."

"I begin to think that you are the artist, Monsieur le Baron, and your friend the diplomat," smiled the Abbé.

IX

Peiresc, or to give him his full name, Claude Fabri de Peiresc, lived in rooms filled from floor to ceiling with books. Pieter found the Provençal statesman sitting at his desk; he rose politely as his visitor entered.

"Don't you recognize me?" Pieter asked.

Peiresc bowed shyly.

"Of course I recognize you, monsieur. You have changed little. Besides, Gevartius told me of your impending visit."

Pieter looked at his host in some surprise; he had expected a different reception.

"Whatever is the matter, Peiresc? You are not a bit the man I once knew in Florence."

Pieter's frankness broke the ice. A moment later they were embracing each other warmly.

"Why didn't we write to each other all these years?" Pieter exclaimed.

"I really don't know. Perhaps we didn't think we should remember each other sufficiently. And false modesty is apt to hold one back. But now tell me about yourself, and then I'll give you what news I have."

Not much had happened to Peiresc. He had returned to France from Florence and shortly afterward had been sent to Paris. He had entered the civil service and quickly made a career for himself. He now lived among his books, conducting a tremendous correspondence with collectors all over Europe. Whenever he could spare a moment from his library, he spent it among the art collections of the city.

"You take no part in political life?"

"Certainly I do. Politics are my job. But, when I return home from my office, I forget all about them."

"And I, as soon as I lay down my brush, think of little else."

The friends found great delight in each other's company. The differences in their characters and interests drew them together: Peiresc had grown more interested in natural science, Pieter in languages and history. After they had talked for two hours, they set out to see the art collections.

And there was much to see. In the royal palace in particular there were many Italian pictures which Pieter knew only by reputation. He showed particular interest in the works of Cellini, who had spent much time at the Court of Francis I.

They were no longer astonished by each other's knowledge. A single word sufficed where others would have required sentences. That evening they had an appointment with Hugo Grotius at an inn. He turned out to be a typical Dutchman, still on the right side of forty, but his face was tired and worried. He and Peiresc were acquaintances of long standing. Pieter began by mentioning their kinship.

"Yes, I know," replied Grotius, "a nephew of mine in Flanders married a Fourment girl. Your sister-in-law is the wife of a brother of hers. That is a source of great pride to me, for your fame has spread to the Netherlands, too. I don't know the Fourments myself. After my escape from prison I passed through Antwerp, but I was in such a hurry, as you can imagine, that I had no time to visit relatives."

"And how are you enjoying life here in Paris? I know your nephew will be glad to have news of you."

"Thank you. I am well enough. I have managed to get an annuity of three thousand livres on which I can live. But I am amazed at your courage, Mynheer Rubens. Few men of your prominence would care to show themselves publicly in my company. Spies follow me everywhere. In Brussels I am regarded as an accursed Protestant heretic; in The Hague as a traitor and a hireling of the Catholics."

He spoke with bitterness. Pieter tried to cheer him.

"Things may change for the better, Mynheer. You may yet return to your country and occupy a position there worthy of your great learning. To my knowledge you achieved remarkable things at a very early age."

Grotius laughed bitterly.

"Early," he echoed. "I should say so. At fourteen Scaliger himself called me his friend; I was at the University of Leyden then. At fifteen poor old Olden-Barnevelt chose me as his traveling companion when he came to France. At twenty-four I was Attorney-General of the Netherlands. At thirty I was Dutch Ambassador in London. At thirty-five I was sentenced to death. When you go home, my dear kinsman, tell everyone that they may trust the Pope, or Gustavus Adolphus, or the King of Spain, or the

Emperor Ferdinand, or the devil himself, but never Maurice of Orange. He is more wicked, ambitious, and cunning than Lucifer himself."

"You interest me," said Pieter. "Tell me all about your struggle with the Prince."

Grotius poured out the story of his bitter grievances. Pieter listened with attention. There were names he made Grotius repeat, for he thought he and his father-in-law might be able to make use of them later. Grotius seemed much relieved to have unburdened himself, and grew more cheerful. He began to speak of his new poems and plays and especially of the great new work which he planned to dedicate to Louis XIII, "*De Jure Belli et Pacis*."

Next day Baron de Vicq came for Pieter at the appointed time and conducted him to the King. Louis XIII did not keep them waiting long. When the great doors of the audience chamber opened and Pieter straightened himself after bowing, he saw standing before him a tall, fair young man of twenty, his pale Bourbon face displaying supercilious boredom. At the age of sixteen this young man had ordered the murder of Concini and the banishment of his mother from Paris. Yet Pieter failed to discover in his features the energy and firmness of purpose these deeds had presumably denoted. He guessed that this lad had given his orders under the influence of the powerful personalities who surrounded the throne.

"How is the health of Her Highness, my aunt?" was the King's first question after Pieter had been presented.

"Her Highness, the Princess Regent, enjoys excellent health, Your Majesty, and seems to have recovered from the great shock which the death of the Archduke Albrecht caused her. Her Highness will be much pleased when I tell her of Your Majesty's interest in her."

The King seemed to pay little attention to Pieter's reply. The Archduchess was not his aunt, but his wife's.

"So you have come to Paris at the command of my royal mother? I hear you are to paint some pictures for her."

"Yes, Sire."

Pieter was watching the King closely, and in spite of his impassive expression he guessed that he was about to receive another royal commission. The King was not going to be outdone by his mother.

"Have you already discussed the pictures?"

"Not yet, Sire. I have the opportunity of discussing them with Your Majesty first."

"Oh, I have not much interest in these pictures. But I have a commission of my own for you. Will you design some tapestries for me?"

"With pleasure, Sire. I shall paint the designs, which can then be woven by the tapestry makers. I shall paint the designs in reverse, for the weavers always work on the wrong side of a tapestry."

"Indeed. Very interesting. Well, I commission you to make twelve designs. You will be given the measurements. I shall also give you the subject: scenes from the life of Constantine the Great. Are you familiar with that subject?"

"Yes, Sire. Constantine's life is a most inspiring subject to an artist."

"Well, suggest to me one or two ideas for the tapestries."

"One of them should show young Constantine escaping from the camp of Galerius to go to his father in Britain. And there would have to be the *In hoc signo vinces* scene, and his victory over Maxentius at the Milvian bridge. Then the scene at Milan where he issued his edict giving all freedom to follow the Christian faith. And I should show him presiding over the council of Nicaea."

"Can you find twelve such ideas?"

"It will be actually difficult to compress his life into twelve such scenes, Sire."

"There is no space for more. And how much will this work cost?"

"I am afraid I cannot answer that question until we have selected a weaver, Your Majesty. May I recommend a firm in Brussels which does excellent work? The financial terms can be arranged in either of two ways: either I simply paint the designs and receive payment for them, leaving Your Majesty's representatives to deal with the weaver; or I myself arrange for the work to be done in Brussels, and receive a lump sum, out of which I pay the cost of the tapestry maker."

"I see. I shall discuss the matter with my chamberlain. In the meantime make a list of subjects and submit it for my approval. In any case you shall draw up the designs."

After the audience Pieter hurried to Pieresc to ask for the loan of a book on Constantine. He then went home and selected the twelve subjects, a list of which De Vicq sent to the King that same day for approval.

"Will His Majesty take a long time to make up his mind?" Pieter asked anxiously.

"Why should he? The King has nothing at all to do. He takes no interest in anything. All state affairs are controlled by Richelieu."

Next day came the audience with the Queen Mother. Maria Medici asked at once:

"Have you been received by the King?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," Pieter answered and continued at once. "His Majesty was extremely kind and has commissioned me to design for him twelve tapestries, the subjects to be taken from the life of Constantine the Great."

"Constantine the Great," repeated the Queen Mother. "I don't know his life as well as I should. What were his relations with his . . . his parents?"

"Your Majesty," replied Pieter, "Constantine's relations with his parents were exemplary."

The Queen Mother seemed relieved.

"But I hope you won't neglect my pictures for the sake of His Majesty's tapestries? I am very glad that you have obtained such a splendid commission, but I should have liked you to complete mine before starting on another. After all, it was my idea that you should come to Paris."

Pieter knew quite well whose idea it had been; nevertheless he humbly thanked the Queen Mother, and prepared to listen to her instructions. But apparently she wished to talk of other things. She spoke of Mantua, and at once began violently abusing her late brother-in-law. She called him a wicked and depraved libertine and said he had ruined the life of her dear sister. Pieter did not, of course, interrupt this outburst. Nor did the Queen Mother seem to expect any comment from him. Her opinions were decided, and she brooked no criticism. She then began to speak of Brussels, and now she had many questions to ask him. Court gossip about the Archduchess Isabella seemed to interest her particularly. She wanted to know if the late Archduke had really been the perfect husband he was said to be. For her part she doubted it, for were not all husbands scoundrels? Pieter was extremely guarded in everything he said, being particularly careful to protect the Archduke's reputation. He asserted that he knew nothing of court gossip, as he lived in Antwerp and his title of

court painter was a title only. At last the Queen Mother came to the pictures.

"You have made a very good impression on me, Rubens, and I intend to speak to you quite frankly about certain intimate matters. There will be two sets of pictures: one will describe my own life, the other that of my late husband, the King. The latter is not urgently required, so let us confine ourselves to the first set. There will be eighteen pictures in it. You won't find it so easy to choose these eighteen subjects as to find scenes from the life of Constantine. . . . Certain differences have at times arisen between me and my son. I can speak frankly of them, for all the world knows of them. Harmony has been restored between us, and Heaven forbid that it should be disturbed by needless recriminations about the past. On the other hand, no one can expect me to allow myself to be publicly humiliated. So the painting of the eighteen subjects will be an exceedingly delicate, not to say diplomatic, task. I require your advice here before you start work. Certain details can, of course, be modified after you have begun, and I can assure you of my fullest co-operation and interest."

Pieter was not slow to recognize the extreme delicacy of his task. In effect he was to paint a justification of the Queen Mother; he was to be a sort of pictorial pamphleteer. He would have to be extremely careful in his selection of subjects. Nor did he relish the idea of constant supervision. If the Queen Mother wanted to be present while he worked, the King might take the same notion. Any new ideas she might suggest would disturb him, while if mother and son quarreled in his presence about the pictures, he would certainly be the scapegoat. All this went through his mind before he replied.

"That would be a great honor for me, Your Majesty, but it is unfortunately impossible. I cannot work in Paris. The commission will take at least two years to complete, and I cannot live without my family for so long as that. If I worked in Paris, it would mean bringing my wife and children here, also the ten members of my staff and my servants. And the additional expense would make such a course quite impracticable."

"Oh, what a pity," said the Queen Mother in genuine disappointment. "I was looking forward to watching the progress of the pictures."

"My loss is also great, Your Majesty, for I shall miss the honor of having my studio visited every day by a queen. But perhaps we may now discuss the eighteen pictures."

The Queen Mother produced some notes, sat down, and motioned Pieter also to be seated.

"I think we ought to start with my childhood in Florence," she began.

"Let us not omit the birth of a queen, Your Majesty," said Pieter. "It was, after all, a fateful moment for France when her greatest queen entered the world."

Maria Medici did not regard this as a compliment, but simply as her due.

"You are right," she said. "But what scene shall we select from my childhood, which was so very sad? I lost my mother early, and my father's second wife was the notorious Bianca Capello, of whom you must certainly have heard in Mantua. That woman tried to win my affection by every means in her power, but I hated her from the bottom of my heart. I was fourteen when my father died in mysterious circumstances. After my uncle Ferdinando came to the throne I felt myself to be a burden to everybody, for I was unwilling to marry. Now tell me, what can we select from all this?"

"The answer is simple, Your Majesty. These matters can mean nothing to France. But it must be of great interest to France to know how its Queen, so famous for her learning and her wit, was educated. Let us call the second picture 'The Education of the Queen.' Art and science should be represented in it; I assure Your Majesty it will make a fine composition."

"Excellent. But now we have a harder nut to crack. I married the King of France, and he did not even see me until some time after the wedding. . . . You have won my confidence and so I can dare to talk of such things in front of you. The truth is that I was really in love with Henry IV; it was the dream of a girl living in loneliness. But what about him? He was a jaded old man when he succeeded in divorcing Marguerite de Valois. Then he wanted to marry the Infanta Isabella, but he was refused the Spanish Netherlands, which he demanded as her dowry. Next he planned to marry his mistress, Gabrielle D'Estrées. But the Duke of Sully wouldn't hear of it, because he knew that France needed money and an alliance with a powerful foreign dynasty. Henry IV owed an immense sum to my family, and gratitude as well. My uncle Ferdinando had persuaded him to become a Catholic, and it was because of this that the Pope recognized him as King of France. Now tell me, how can you paint

the picture of this marriage between an innocent girl and a lustful old man, who was not even present at the ceremony, so that it can suggest the idea of love? 'Maria Medici dreaming of Henry IV.' Don't you think that a good idea?"

Pieter suppressed the remarks that rose in his mind. The "innocent girl" dreaming of her fairy prince had been twenty-seven at the time of her engagement. And she had had to wait so long for a husband because there was not a princeling in Europe who was willing to marry into the family of a man suspected of fratricide. But Pieter's demeanor showed no sign of what was passing in his mind.

"No, Your Majesty, I do not think that is exactly a happy idea. Someone might deduce from the picture that Henry IV married you out of pity. I thought of painting the scene where the King receives the portrait of Maria Medici. I would show, by the expression in his face, that he had fallen in love at once with that lovely face."

"Rubens, you are really a clever man. An excellent idea. The next scene will be the wedding in Florence."

"Yes, Your Majesty. I was present in Florence at the time, and I made sketches, though I never expected I should one day be able to use them."

"You must paint this scene very nicely, especially the wedding gown, which you have already mentioned to me. The next picture should be of my arrival on French soil, when I disembarked at Marseilles."

"Yes, I can make a good job of that. Next should come Your Majesty's first meeting with the King."

"That took place at Lyons. I have also made a note of the splendid reception which was held in my honor at Paris, with fireworks."

"Let us not be too lavish with subjects, Your Majesty. We have six already. I suggest the next should be the birth of His Majesty Louis XIII."

"Good, but not with that title. I prefer 'The Birth of the Dauphin.' And now, Rubens, you must be really clever. For now followed my bitter and unhappy married life. What should we include of that?"

"Nothing, Your Majesty. The Queen considers it beneath her dignity to refer to the behavior of the King. And we must remember that it is the father of the present King who is involved. An ideal mother, such as Your Majesty, cannot even hint at the character of her husband in front of her child. I suggest that we completely neglect this period in Your Majesty's life."

"You are right, though I have noted down ten different subjects I thought we might have used. Next comes the coronation. The King at the time of the scandal over the little Montmorency girl wished to go to war, he was so furious. You probably know about that."

"Yes, Your Majesty. I saw the exiled Duke of Condé with his young wife in Brussels."

"Well, what did you think of that little hussy who drove an old man crazy? But she's no longer pretty now. She's ugly, she's simply hideous. Anyhow, before the King joined his army, he had me crowned. The next picture should be of the coronation. Then came the murder of the King."

"We cannot have a picture of that, Your Majesty. It would be too horrible to include in such a series. And we must consider the feelings of the present King. What would he think if he were to see a picture of the murder of his father every time he visited his mother? We must somehow incorporate this scene into the next picture. What should that be, Your Majesty?"

"My Regency. This picture must portray the happiness of France during that time."

"Very well, Your Majesty. I shall paint the happiness of the people, the prosperity of the country. But now, if I am not mistaken, we come to the most delicate period of all."

"Yes. The intrigues of that base man, Condé. That treaty at Poitiers will remain the greatest shame in all history. That my son should have been made to believe that Concini intended to poison him! My poor misguided son was only a tool in other hands. He was not strong enough to forbid the guards to do what they did. They shot Concini, who died for me; I still pray for his salvation. After that came my imprisonment in Blois and my flight. And then the mediation of Richelieu, whom I cannot praise too highly. It was only for his sake that I gave the reins of government back into the King's hands. I was not obliged to do so, for I was still the Regent. I let him have the crown because I knew Richelieu would be the real ruler of the country. I really don't know what should be done about this period. There are still nine pictures left. Can you suggest subjects for them? I cannot."

"Your Majesty, anyone who relinquishes power to the King becomes a subject of the King. A loyal subject may try to justify himself, but not

at the expense of the royal authority. There were other events during this period. His Majesty married, for example."

"Yes, and my daughter too."

"So we have another two subjects, Your Majesty. The marriage of Louis XIII, and the marriage of the Queen of Spain. The last picture of the series should obviously be 'The Queen's Regency comes to an end, Louis XIII becomes King.' Tell me, Your Majesty, under your regency was there any outstanding military success?"

"Of course, the occupation of Juliers."

"That is sufficient, Your Majesty. As for the sad disharmony between Your Majesty and your son, we can resolve this by introducing Mount Olympus in the background. Let us show the gods holding a council at which love and wisdom triumph. Then a separate picture could depict the peace between the royal mother and the royal son. That leaves only three subjects still undecided, but I advise Your Majesty to do nothing about them at present. With the passing of time wounds heal. . . ."

"So you think the situation may improve?"

Pieter's blood quickened. The Queen Mother of France was actually asking him whether he thought her relations with her own son would improve. How proud his mother and Philips would have been. . . .

"I am convinced of that, Your Majesty. Surely His Majesty trusts Richelieu absolutely, and surely Your Majesty is firmly convinced of the loyalty and good will of His Eminence."

"Yes, the King does trust him, and Richelieu would go through fire for my sake."

"Then only good can ensue. . . . Well, Your Majesty, the subjects for the pictures up to the coronation have been decided I think. After that the Regency follows. Here some changes in detail may be necessary, but we have many months to consider such changes. As soon as eight of the pictures are finished I shall bring them to Paris. It will be useful to see how they look in their places in the gallery. I humbly ask Your Majesty's approval of this arrangement."

"It is granted, Rubens. We dismiss you in full favor, but not willingly. Tell your mistress, the Archduchess, that I envy her in having you as her court painter. We have so few people with whom we can talk intimately."

"Your Majesty's kindness touches me deeply. But there is one matter

which should be attended to before I take my leave. I should like to make two quick sketches of Your Majesty. Although no one who has seen Your Majesty's face once can forget it, I should like to do this part of the work as finely and accurately as possible."

"Yes, I realize that. I am sure my courtiers will be astonished that I have given you such a long audience. But we shall not trouble about that. Make your sketches now, if you wish."

Pieter took his sketchbook and crayon. With swift strokes he drew the swollen pouches beneath her eyes, the curling corners of her mouth, the thick underlip, the strong, rounded double chin, but all this with infinite tact, so that the Queen Mother seemed almost handsome. Her Majesty stared in front of her like a simpering bride. She was forty-nine years old, but her mannerisms, her movements, her way of speaking were those of a woman ten years younger, of a woman who knew her power to charm, but whose high rank imposed upon her a certain loneliness. She glanced at the sketches and approved them with a kindly nod. But, before Pieter withdrew, she put one more question to him.

"Will you be able to make me appear young enough in the wedding picture and the other portraits of me as a girl, Rubens?"

"I shall paint the truth, Your Majesty. I have never seen a younger or more beautiful bride than she I saw in Florence."

After leaving the palace, Pieter immediately called upon Peiresc. He showed him the sketches but said nothing of what had been discussed at the audience. Soon they were in the middle of a political discussion.

"You, at any rate, are in a fortunate position; you don't have to fear war."

"What do you mean, we don't have to fear war? We are in the middle of a war now."

"What war?"

"Don't you know that civil war is raging at this very moment in France? Of course, you have every excuse for not knowing; there is no sign of it in Paris. We ourselves are used to it, even bored by it. People are talking of it just now because it is said that the King himself intends to lead his armies. Where is the war? Chiefly in the province of Béarn. Béarn is still a Huguenot stronghold. They still look back to the early days of Henry IV's reign there, before he had discovered that Paris was worth a mass. They have courageous leaders; the best of them, perhaps,

is Henri Rohan. Last year he revolted against the Catholic authority and took to arms. Now there is a regular war going on in the province, with battles, massacres, the burning of villages. But I repeat, Paris takes little interest in what happens down there. Two people are chiefly concerned with the war, De Luynes, the Minister of State, and Richelieu, who has his finger in every pie, especially when his own authority and influence are involved."

"Tell me, who is this Richelieu?"

"Well, I shall describe him briefly. He was born an aristocrat and poor; now he demands satisfaction from fate for his bitter youth. His real name is Du Plessis. Well, Du Plessis, the poor young priest, has received every satisfaction from Cardinal Richelieu. He is no longer troubled by poverty; his palace is one of the finest in Paris. Now he is out to achieve rank. He cannot become King, but he wants to step into the King's shoes. He is extremely ambitious and talented. He punishes every disloyalty to himself mercilessly; but he himself is the most disloyal of men."

"Isn't there anyone or anything to which he is loyal?"

"Oh, yes, there is France. No one can deny that he is a real patriot. His latest success is his making Paris into an archbishopric instead of a bishopric. Scarcely had he received his cardinal's hat when he began to make violent complaints to the Holy See that Paris, the capital of the French King, was only a bishopric."

"What is his goal? What are his political ideas?"

"One can only guess, for he doesn't betray himself in any way, that in general he follows the policy of Henry IV. He wants to strengthen the throne and by doing so make France a much stronger power. Mark my words, the Hapsburgs are his mortal enemies; and, as both Spain and the Holy Roman Empire belong to that dynasty, both countries have good cause to fear him."

"Tell me, is he really a loyal supporter of the Queen Mother, as she believes?"

"Certainly, so long as she does not undermine the power of the throne. But, if she interferes with his plans, Richelieu will forget his loyalty and show no mercy. But I think Prince Gaston will feel his displeasure sooner than the Queen. You don't know Prince Gaston? He is the King's brother, the Duke of Orléans. He is a full-blooded young fellow, and the two young men don't get on very well together. By the time his mustache

begins to sprout, there will be certainly some new political party centering round him. But Richelieu will nip any attempt at a *coup d'état* in the bud, you may be certain. Perhaps the Huguenots will want to work with young Gaston, but they are no longer an important force. You see, their revolt doesn't interest us even as much as Graubünden."

"What, the Valtellina question? I'm greatly interested in it. How do you regard it here?"

"As you know, the valley connects the Tyrol and Milan; that is, it separates the Spanish and the Austrian Hapsburgs. When the Canton of Graubünden accepted the Reformation and became the chief power in the valley, the connection between the Tyrol and Milan was cut. That was an extremely pleasant state of things for us Frenchmen. But last year a Catholic revolution broke out; the Protestants were massacred, and the valley was occupied by Spanish soldiers. We don't like that, and we have already protested to the Spanish government, as have Venice and Savoy. War may break out at any time, and it will be a war against the world domination of the Hapsburgs."

"And what is the role of Venice in the matter?"

Pieter was indefatigably curious, but his interest was not confined to foreign politics. He was equally eager to hear of French domestic affairs. He discovered that the most important monkish order in France was that of the Capuchins, the most influential figure in it being a certain Father Joseph, the intimate friend of Richelieu. Pieter also discovered which persons grouped themselves around the King, the Queen Mother, and Prince Gaston.

Peiresc's friendship was invaluable to him during his stay in Paris. And it seemed likely that his visit would be indefinitely prolonged. The King was slow in giving his approval to Pieter's list of suggestions for the Constantine series. Nor did Pieter try to hurry him. He loved to explore Paris. Peiresc took him everywhere, and in spite of the hard winter they went to Versailles and Fontainebleau. They frequented the bookshops and visited the antique dealers; Pieter bought many antiques. He looked particularly for *gemmae*, because he had seen some lovely pieces in Peiresc's collection; but he found nothing comparable in the shops. He discovered that three Andalusian horses were for sale and made an excellent bargain. For a long time he had wanted to buy a pair in order to keep a carriage for Bella. Unfortunately the dealer was unwilling

to sell two only of the horses. Pieter bargained with him for three days, and at last was compelled to take all three, although at a most advantageous price. The Baron gave him a trustworthy courier who would conduct the horses to Brussels.

At last the King accepted all his suggestions without alteration. A good many weeks had passed, but still Pieter delayed his departure. He was still hunting for antiques; he was still busy seeking the solution of several political problems and obtaining first-hand information on French policy and personalities. But at last he could remain no longer, for he had to be present at the wedding of one of the Fourment girls at home. She was the third of the Fourment children, twenty-three, but already a widow. Delmonte, her husband, had died suddenly, but her fair beauty could not remain long hidden and now she was to marry Arnold Lunden. Pieter set out on the homeward journey, again traveling by carriage, and reached Brussels without any noteworthy incident. There he stayed for a day or two to make his report to the Archduchess. This took two and a half hours, and Isabella listened to everything he said with close attention. She was about to make some notes when Pieter presented her with a thick pile of documents. The Archduchess pressed his hand warmly.

"You have brought me invaluable information, Rubens. You have earned my gratitude."

The horses had arrived without coming to any harm, and he now bought a carriage. But, as the roads were very bad in winter, he did not use the carriage to complete the rest of his journey. Instead he hired a light wagon, harnessed his horses to it, and thus arrived in Antwerp. When he reached his house, he bade the coachman go and fetch Bella to see the horses. She came running out, clapping her hands with glee.

That was on the fourth of March. Pieter had returned to Antwerp after an absence of more than two months. He found everything in excellent order, work in the studio had progressed well, and the finished pictures required only the master's touch here and there before they could be sent to their buyers.

"I have great news," said Van Dyck. "I am going to Italy. I only waited for your return, sir. I am to travel with an Italian nobleman, the Cavaliere Vanni."

"You are traveling just as I did," replied Pieter, happy for his friend's

sake. "But don't stay too long, and don't let anyone rob you of your money."

Then Snijders took him aside.

"Pieter, I think it my duty to tell you something. Vorsterman is quite out of his mind. He is telling the whole town that you have ruined his life, and he is only waiting for your return to revenge himself."

"Thank you, Frans. I will be careful. Apparently everyone is waiting for me."

At noon on the eight of March they set out for the wedding of Susanna Fourment. Both Pieter and Bella were fond of the pretty, vivacious girl, and Pieter had once painted her. Little Clara was left at home, but the two boys accompanied them. As they turned a corner, a figure suddenly confronted them.

"So you are here, you wretch. I am going to kill you for ruining my life," the man shouted.

A dagger gleamed in his raised hand. It was Vorsterman. Pieter jumped forward and seized the man's arm. Bella sank against a wall screaming. The two boys began to cry in terror. Vorsterman staggered and dropped the dagger. Pieter still kept hold of him and slapped his face violently twice. But he at once regretted his action when he looked into the eyes of the unfortunate man. He was clearly insane. He began to mumble.

"Ruined me. . . . Rubens. . . . Ruined me. . . . revenge. . . . Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . . ."

He did not seem to have felt the two blows. The madman's face was so horribly interesting to Pieter that he at once drew a sketch of it in his mind. By this time passers-by had hurried to the spot. One of them picked up the dagger.

"Don't hurt him," said Pieter. "The poor fellow is out of his wits. Take him home and put him to bed."

He turned to Bella and was just in time to catch her before she fell in a faint. The two children were still crying loudly and clutching at his legs. A small crowd had gathered.

"Bella," said Pieter gently but firmly. "Take hold of yourself. We must not make a scene in the street. We shall be late for the wedding, and as you know I have to be there early on account of the procession."

Then he turned to the children and patted their heads.

"Why are you crying, you little sillies? Don't you know that the man

was only joking? But we weren't frightened, were we, boys? Dry your eyes and let's go on."

With great difficulty he restored the spirits of his family. He said a few words to reassure the crowd, which began to disperse. It took all Bella's courage to suppress her sobs. Pieter talked all the time of the sights on the way. When they reached the church, the spirits of the children were completely restored, but Bella was still very pale.

The wedding went off without a hitch, and the young bride was greatly admired for her beauty. The banquet followed at the Fourment house. Pieter put little Helen next to himself. She was now almost eight years old, a little girl of fairylike beauty, the youngest and prettiest of the eleven children. Suddenly, in the middle of the feast, Clara came up to Pieter. She seemed greatly disturbed.

"Pieter, I have just heard that you were attacked on your way to the church."

"Oh, it wasn't really serious. A poor lunatic. . . . Pray don't bother yourself about it." He turned to the little girl. "You wouldn't let anyone harm me, would you, Helen?"

For answer the child embraced him, pressing her curly head to his velvet coat.

X

The attempt on Pieter's life caused an immense sensation in the town. Throughout the following day his house was overrun by visitors. He found this attention flattering but somewhat burdensome. After some hours he had no alternative but to go out and address the crowd, which cheered him and then dispersed. He returned to the studio, where his father-in-law, Van der Wouwere, Moretus, and others were arguing over the incident. Later, Ophoven, the Dominican Abbot and his father confessor, arrived. He was the only calm member of the company; the others were excited and argumentative. They advocated the most diverse policies: the mad engraver should be locked up at once; an armed guard should be posted round the house; a deputation should proceed to Rockox. Pieter dismissed all such suggestions; the whole affair bored him, and he wanted to settle down to work. By evening, when the excitement had begun to abate, Rockox himself came along.

"Some of your friends have been seeing me about you, Pieter," he began. "I don't understand what it's all about. But tell me what you wish me to do."

"The whole thing is stupid. Poor Vorsterman was always a hot-headed fellow. I paid his wages for a long time and got little work out of him. At last I had to dismiss him. Now apparently he has lost his wits. Yesterday he attacked me in the street. I slapped his face. . . . I regret it now. There is nothing to be done about him. His family should take care of him."

"Couldn't you take him back?"

"Impossible. It would be throwing money out of the window. He is the best engraver in Antwerp, but I can't work with a lunatic. Please don't worry about the matter. It isn't worth your while. I have much more important news; I have brought you a message from Peiresc."

They had a long conversation about Peiresc and his books. Then Rockox left. Some weeks later, Pieter was asked to visit the Mayor's

office. Rockox showed him a letter from the Archduchess written in French.

To the Mayors and Aldermen of Antwerp, from the Archduchess Isabella, Regent of the Spanish Netherlands.

My trusted friends:

As we have received information that a wicked dog and sometime employee has threatened the person of Pierre Paul Rubens and sworn to kill that gentleman, we feel moved to tell you that you must permit no harm to come to Mynheer Rubens and do everything needful to secure his peace and safety.

"Do you know anything of this letter?" Rockox asked.

"All I can suggest is that some of my overzealous friends have sent a petition to Brussels."

"Well, how am I to guard you? Would you like me to have soldiers posted round your house?"

"God forbid. If anyone needs such precautions, he is lost. I would rather you recommended two young painters to me. Van Dyck is going away, and I shall need at least two to replace him."

"I'm sorry. I know of no one. But I am sure you will find some way out of the difficulty. You always know how to help yourself."

Thus, while Van Dyck prepared to leave for Italy, Pieter was much puzzled how to carry on with the work of the studio, and in particular how to devote himself undisturbed to the pictures commissioned by Maria Medici. Then one day a painter called Lucas van Uden came to the studio. He was twenty-six, shy and modest in manner, and he carried a winter landscape under his arm.

"Are you related to Ortus van Uden?" Pieter asked.

"I am his son, sir."

"That is a good recommendation. Show me your picture."

Pieter gave it a single glance and engaged Van Uden at once. Good things, like bad, usually come together. That same day he discovered among the candidates another promising painter. He was only fifteen and had worked in the studio of Blijenberch. But the boy was not happy there and it was his dream to enter the Rubens studio. His name was Theodoor van Thulden. He showed his drawings, and Pieter at once engaged him as an apprentice; one of the apprentices had fallen ill.

Van Dyck was now ready to leave. A few days before his departure a

cart arrived at the door containing a picture as a farewell gift to his master. It was an immense canvas, ten feet by twelve, depicting the seizure of Christ. The young artist had worked on it at home for weeks and in secret, for he intended it as a surprise. Everyone in the studio gathered to admire it. In composition Van Dyck had proved himself worthy of his master. In a single scene he had united all the elements of the story: a group of rough soldiers rushing to lay hands on Jesus; the kiss of Judas; Peter drawing his sword. The figures were grouped with a wonderful sense of balance and effect. Pieter was overjoyed and embraced his friend again and again, while he explained to the men in the studio the beauties of the picture. Then he suddenly seized Anthony's arm and dragged him to the stable. He led out one of the Andalusians.

"He is yours, Anthony. Ride him to Italy."

Now it was Van Dyck's turn to be enchanted. He patted the beautiful animal's neck and contemplated it for several minutes from different sides. Then he began to consider what color his traveling suit should be to harmonize with his new mount. Later he sat down with his master to make notes on the journey, although they had already spent days discussing it. Pieter explained what collections he should visit, where the best inns were to be found, to whom he should present his letters of introduction. Then one morning the easels were rearranged in the studio, of which Anthony van Dyck was no longer a member.

But the work went on. Pieter received a letter from Peiresc, for his friend had promised to keep in constant touch with the Abbé de Maugis. The Queen Mother had decided to have the gallery rebuilt, and this would mean new measurements for the pictures. The architect had noted these accurately, and Peiresc enclosed them with a long, cordial letter. By this time Pieter was well ahead with the sketches for the first set. As a recreation he turned once more to the palaces of Genoa. For Van Dyck's sake he had brought out his Italian notes, and while they had talked all his memories had returned. He had still many sketches of the palaces of Genoa which Moretus had not used in his book. There was, indeed, more than sufficient material for another volume; he had the details—façades, ground plans, cross-sections—of about twelve more palaces, mostly designed by the famous architect, Galeazzo Alessi. This material would cover at least seventy pages, in book form. So Moretus published another volume of *Palazzi di Genova*. But for Pieter this work

was merely a relaxation. He had commissions in plenty. He spent much of his time in planning the Constantine tapestries for the King. He read a great deal and steeped himself in the atmosphere of the early Christian era. And these studies gave him a new idea; he decided to paint the scene where, after the massacre in Thessalonica, St. Ambrose refused to admit the Emperor Theodosius to his church.

As he painted this picture, he experienced the same sort of delight as a good swimmer feels when he cleaves the water. The subject gave full scope for his talent for composition. The scene was enacted on the two steps leading to the door of the church. The Emperor was thus at a lower level than the Saint, who confronted him in a forbidding attitude. The position of the two men admirably brought up the difference between the spiritual and the temporal power. The Emperor was shown as a cunning and forceful tyrant seeking to win the good will of the saint by flattery and guile. One felt that in a moment that expression of ingratiating meekness would change into one of infuriated amazement. The Saint's face was gentle yet severe. On the extreme left stood a grim general of the Emperor, a soldier watching the scene with the idle curiosity of a man of action, while on the extreme right was a priest with a calm, somewhat ironic face.

When Pieter could paint his pictures without help from his assistants, he felt perfectly happy. He had recently adopted the habit of having a book read to him as he worked; all he asked was that it should have nothing to do with the theme he was treating. He handed one of the apprentices a volume of Tacitus; and, while the boy read, he listened and painted. The rise and fall of the Latin phrases made him feel almost as if he were in a dream world. But, when the picture was finished, he was jolted back to reality by bad news.

Though war still only threatened Antwerp, its fires were already burning all over Europe. The conflict was becoming more and more infuriated, the fight more and more merciless. It was said that Wallenstein did not pay his men, but instead allowed them to plunder freely. On entering towns and villages they behaved like wild beasts. Tilly, on the other hand, maintained iron order among his well-paid mercenaries. Eighteen horsemen in his army had been court-martialed for plundering peaceful householders. All were sentenced to death. The men threw dice to discover the order in which they were to die. The one who lost was

at once taken to be hanged; and, while he kicked his heels from the branch of a tree the winner was dicing with the next man. The bestiality of the combatants infected ordinary citizens; people seemed to fly at each other's throats for no apparent reason, and even in the highest circles bloody fights were common. Travelers told how at the Imperial Council at Regensburg, as the great dignitaries were on their way to Mass, Count Oñate, the Spanish Ambassador, and Gritti, the Venetian Ambassador, picked a quarrel at the door of the church, attacked each other with their fists and rolled on the marble floor, scratching and biting.

On the whole the fortunes of war favored the Catholic side. In Bohemia order was restored with inhuman cruelty; the Czech dissenting noblemen returned one by one to the Papist faith. But the victory was not complete. Tilly had just been heavily defeated by Mansfeld at Wiesloch. The tide might turn at any moment; and, though Spinola was leading the Spanish army bravely on foreign soil, he might be forced back to Spanish territory, and destruction might suddenly engulf Brussels and Antwerp. Pieter was still working on his old plan for arranging an unofficial contact between Prince Maurice and Peckius. Now he was not familiar with the situation in The Hague, while Grotius had given him a great deal of valuable information in Paris. He decided on a daring step: he resolved to meet the younger Jan Brant himself. This, at first glance, seemed to be impossible; he could hardly expect to receive a passport to The Hague; since the armistice had legally expired, the two countries were at war. But he attempted the impossible. He wrote to Van Veen and—got the passport. But later he realized that after all that was not so remarkable. He was regarded as a harmless painter who wished to go to The Hague on business, probably about the engravings of his pictures. No one in Antwerp except his father-in-law suspected that he had a secret political mission—so how could anyone know in The Hague? He collected a few etchings, sketches, and engravings and set out.

It gave him a strange sensation to walk about in the enemy's capital. He saw a new country where people dressed, talked, and built differently; the rhythm of life was different; the street scenes lacked the monks' habits and nuns' coifs so frequent in Antwerp. This was a Protestant country where it was forbidden to represent the Mother of God and the saints in painting or sculpture. Could an artist be a Protestant? Of course

he could—after all there were painters in Holland. Even in Catholic Antwerp there was Jordaens, a secret Protestant.

Pieter was careful to waste hours in unnecessary discussions about engravings, and his meeting with the younger Jan Brant lasted only an hour and a half. Since his business took him to the Dutch capital, it was natural to call on his wife's first cousin. The younger Jan Brant looked exactly like a masculine version of Bella, and this endeared him at once to Pieter. During their conversation he discovered that in character his half-cousin also resembled Bella; he was quiet, cheerful yet serious, calm, and seemed entirely trustworthy. His father, Bella's uncle, a huge, fat, asthmatic, loud-voiced, and jovial man, lived in the same house but took no part in the discussions.

Jan told Pieter that he had spoken to Prince Maurice at least five times about the possibility of an unofficial contact with Peckius. The Prince would have been glad to get into touch with the Brussels Court if he could do so without the knowledge of the States General, but he had postponed the matter in his anxiety to prevent anything leaking out. In his complicated foreign policy the threads of which were extremely difficult to unravel, the Prince's chief consideration was France; when he discovered that Rubens had spent a considerable time in Paris, he began to suspect that a trap had been set for him and that France wished to discover his attitude toward her. Jan was surprised by the clear idea Pieter had of the secret motives of Dutch politics, while Pieter was amazed at the information Jan possessed about the intimate court life at Brussels. They talked like paid spies, and yet neither of them was a spy. Both of them wanted peace and hated violence and bloodshed.

Pieter was very fond of the Archduchess; Jan clung with the same affection to the Prince of Orange. He admired the Prince's intelligence, tenacity, and political shrewdness, and spoke with deep respect of his rank. This respect was a little too deep for Pieter's liking; and when Jan remarked that the mother of the Prince had been the daughter of August the Strong, the ruler of Saxony, Pieter suddenly remembered his childhood at Siegen. In those years the daughter of August the Strong had been in love with Jan Rubens. . . .

They agreed on many questions and decided to go on striking the iron while it was hot. They had little time left to discuss family matters. Pieter made a brief mention of Bella and the children, remarking sadly

that their little daughter was sinking rapidly, but that the boys were a great joy to him. Albrecht was eight, going to school and doing very well; Nicolaas was four; and both were healthy and handsome.

When he returned to Flanders, he took good care not to visit Brussels at once. He remained in Antwerp and sent his report in a lengthy letter to the Chancellor. Breughel himself took the letter to Brussels, without suspecting that he was the messenger in a serious political intrigue. Pieter continued his work on the pictures for the French Court. He was also looking for an engraver to replace Vorsterman. He refused several candidates, for he wanted to find a first-class man. Finally he engaged a very young pupil of Vorsterman's. His name was Du Pont, but he had Latinized his name into Pontius. His was an immature but promising talent. Pieter engaged him, telling him that he would train him to become a famous engraver. Vorsterman himself kept silent. Pieter steadfastly refused to prefer a charge against him; the man was not insane enough to be locked up in an asylum, so he continued to live with his father-in-law, who was a printer. Some said that he wanted to leave the country and this turned out to be true; some time later he set out to try his luck in England.

In the meantime the Queen Mother was awaiting impatiently the sketches of the first eight pictures. Peiresc played an important part as go-between; he stipulated that he should receive the Queen Mother's instructions from the Abbé de Maugis and send them on to his friend. These instructions were not always welcome; Pieter's fears were justified—Maria Medici altered the subjects of the paintings according to the fluctuations of court intrigue, and not always in a way which suited the painter. Suddenly the Abbé himself adopted the role of an art expert; he urged the completion of the sketches with such surprising impatience that Pieter began to suspect that the fat priest had some ulterior motive. But, even if that were so, he could not refuse the request of the Queen's representative. As soon as he had finished the sketches, he dispatched them to Peiresc.

Soon a disturbing letter arrived from Peiresc. The architect had changed his plans for rebuilding the gallery, thereby enlarging the space reserved for three paintings. The new plan of the gallery arrived; it would have nine windows on each side, looking toward the courtyard and the garden of the Palais Luxembourg; the space for pictures on the connecting

wall had been increased, and on the fourth wall there was now place for the portraits of the Queen Mother and her parents. Every letter brought some new alteration or suggestion; Pieter knew that it was not advisable to argue by correspondence about the subjects of the pictures. He had to work hard and drive the whole studio to new efforts. Then again he could not neglect his work for the French King. He knew that he would anger one of the two royal households in Paris if he delivered his work to one before the other. At least four of the tapestries had to be designed at once. And everything was most urgent, for it was late autumn and the Queen Mother had told him that she wanted to see him in Paris with the finished pictures not later than February 25, 1623. Princess Henrietta was to marry the Prince of Wales, and by the time of the wedding the pictures had to be in the gallery. So Pieter worked at high pressure from sunrise to sunset. He worked simultaneously on twelve huge canvasses. At the same time he could not neglect his clients in Flanders. He had also a large correspondence, especially with Paris. He had to send to Peiresc again and again for help. He had to ask him, for instance, at what time of the day Maria Medici had been born because he needed the information for his allegorical picture. Then he required a copy of a certain bust, which would supplement the rapid sketches he had made of the Queen Mother. Sometimes he could not avoid going to Brussels, either because he had received some message from The Hague which he did not dare to entrust to anybody else, or because he had heard something which he thought might be useful to the Archduchess.

He enjoyed now the complete trust of Isabella. When he visited her again, he found her in a very sad state. And, when he remarked upon the fact, the Archduchess burst into tears.

"I have received bad news from Spain, Rubens. It is about Count Villamediana."

"Yes, I have just heard about it. The Count has been shot dead while out driving. But why does that touch Your Highness so closely?"

"I will tell you, though I wouldn't tell anyone else. I am sure you will respect my confidence. I must have someone to whom I can open my heart. My nephew, Philip IV, is still very young and rash. And his wife is equally irresponsible, although she is two years older. I know how difficult it is for a young wife. At that age one thinks of nothing but love. That makes your wives appear coquettish, yet afterward they settle

down and become most admirable women. Count Villamediana didn't realize that, for men—forgive me—are not usually very wise in such matters. He took the young Queen's behavior for coquetry and began to court her passionately. Once, when the royal couple were staying with him, he set fire to the palace so as to have an excuse for taking the Queen in his arms in rescuing her. Then he lost his wits completely and began to sneer at the King. He wrote lampoons, very offensive ones. They caused much scandal at Court. These verses came to the notice of my nephew, and as a young husband, let alone a King, he could not tolerate that anyone should court his wife. Philip was furious, and some courtiers heard him use violent language about the Count. At these moments there is always someone willing to translate the expressed wish of a King into action. Now you know why Count Villamediana was shot while out driving. And, when I think of what they must be saying in the Spanish Court, I could cry for sheer humiliation."

"Your Highness, time heals all wounds. In two years no one will speak of Count Villamediana. And then crowned heads have a great advantage over ordinary men: they can blame their advisers for all their mistakes."

"That is very true, Rubens. Alas, some advisers are to be blamed. My nephew, who is really a kind-hearted young man, has dismissed both the Duke of Lerma and his son. They have been indicted and ordered to pay immense fines. In this the King has acted wisely. But he has made the same mistakes as his father, nevertheless. At the moment Spain's master is another favorite, Count Olivarez. Mark this name: its bearer will give us much trouble."

"But if we have borne Lerma, we can bear him too. Let us put our trust in God."

"That is all we can do. But for you I have especially good news, Rubens. Your reports concerning the activities of certain persons have proved wholly reliable. General van Bergh has no longer any authority. I recently received Spinola, who is of course greatly interested in army matters. I told him everything, and also mentioned the part you have played. He said of you, 'Painting is the least of Rubens's merits. We have to thank him for much more than that.' I am glad to repeat his words to you. And now tell me what news you have from The Hague."

"Nothing since my last report, Your Highness. But shortly I hope to be

able to tell you something more positive. In the near future I shall visit Paris again."

For half an hour they discussed politics. Pieter now possessed so much knowledge and experience, so many connections, that he could form his own opinions, which were always sober and reliable. The Archduchess was glad to listen to him. She was by no means a stupid woman; she had gone through a good Hapsburg schooling at her husband's side and liked to follow her own ideas. But she also liked to make use of the brains of others. When Pieter took his leave, the Archduchess said, "God keep you, Rubens. I shall pray for your child."

And the child did indeed need her prayers. Little Clara was slowly but perceptibly wasting away. Her skin became transparent, her tiny hands fleshless, her bones stood out in her shrunken body. She hardly spoke for days together, but sat silently in her carriage—or rather lay, for sitting tired her. Early in the new year she took to her bed. And now she lay silently there, without complaint. A stranger in the room would scarcely have noticed her. Pieter and Bella knew that the guttering candle of her life could not last much longer. Bella's eyes were often reddened by crying. Pieter tried to forget his sorrow in work. But sometimes even that failed to distract him, and he would put down his brush and sit in silent dejection. He could not have said what passed through his mind at such times.

As if fate wished to recompense him, about this time he received satisfaction for an injustice done to him long ago by the former Bishop of Ghent, Van der Burghe, who had failed to honor the contract for an altarpiece, entered into by his predecessor. Even a strong note from the Archduke had failed to make Van der Burghe change his mind. Then, however, he had received another appointment, and Jacob Boonen, the new Bishop, who liked neither pictures nor statues, decided that the altar should have a statue, but not a group of statues, as Van der Burghe had wished. This single statue was never completed, for Jacob Boonen suddenly died. For nearly a year Anton Triest had been Bishop of Ghent, and he now sent for Pieter.

Pieter went to Ghent and was received at once.

"I know the whole story," the Bishop began, "so don't bother to tell me of your grievance. I am a great admirer of your art, and old De Maes was a good friend to me in my youth. He often told me toward the end that he longed to go on living simply to see your altarpiece completed. I

look upon this matter as a sacred trust. The statue, however, having been ordered, must be completed. I cannot fall into Van der Burghe's error. Yet we have no money to spend over and above the original sum. So don't paint a triptych for us, but a single picture. The statue will be placed high on the altar and your picture will be shown off to good advantage. Have you still got your old sketch?"

"I have, Reverend Father, and I think you will be satisfied with it. I am so grateful for your consideration for me that I will do my very best."

Pieter went to the church to examine the altar once more and observe the lighting. Then he returned to Antwerp. He found the old sketch, but quickly replaced it against the wall. He had no spirit for work. And yet February the twenty-fifth was approaching. The thought that he was shortly to leave for Paris filled him with dismay. He could not bear to think of leaving the sickly child whose life had almost run its course.

But fate once more intervened on his behalf; it was no longer necessary to deliver the eight pictures to the Queen Mother by that date. For some inexplicable reason the King of England had given up the idea of marrying off the Prince of Wales to the sister of the French King. The festivities in Paris were indefinitely postponed. Peiresc wrote that there was intense excitement at the French Court, for the rumor had spread that the Prince of Wales was interested not in the sister of the King of France now but in the sister of the King of Spain. If this rumor were true, a far-reaching change in the foreign policies of all the major powers was certain. So Pieter had good reason for believing that the Queen Mother had better things to do than await delivery of his pictures. He stayed at home, working listlessly and visiting his little daughter several times a day. Clara was fading daily; only her eyes seemed to be alive. They were incredibly large and bright, as if all her strength were concentrated in them.

About the middle of March she seemed to take a turn for the better. She asked for a doll, greeted her father with a smile, and even spoke cheerfully for a few moments.

"God is working a miracle," cried Bella, her face alive with hope. "We must give something to the poor to show our thankfulness."

"Yes, my dear, I will give something to the sick. I hear that Marten Pepijn is putting into position the altarpiece he has painted for the St. Elizabeth Hospital. He has been asking me for a long time to have a look at his work, but I have had no time. But I'll go along tomorrow, and

you come, too. After all, you are the godmother of Pepijn's daughter, and it is only fitting that you should be present."

So next day they went to the church of the hospital. Pepijn welcomed them with great joy and began to describe his work with many sweeping gestures. One panel depicted St. Elizabeth of Hungary distributing largess to the poor, while angels hovered above her head holding the crown of love. In the foreground a mother was playing with her child. Bella burst into tears.

"What's the matter," Pepijn asked, surprised.

"Do not ask her. Our little daughter is very ill," said Pieter softly. "Let's talk about the picture."

"Do you like it? Tell me frankly."

"Frankly, I like it. And there is something I admire especially in your work, Marten."

"What is it?" asked the painter.

"There are very few painters in Antwerp who can forget that I exist. But you don't show any trace of my influence. In a hundred years no spectator will suspect that we lived and worked at the same time. How old are you, Marten?"

"Fifty-two."

"Soon I shall be forty-six. . . . Well, to say that he is himself is the highest praise one can bestow on an artist. Now please excuse us; we want to pray here and then visit the hospital."

Pieter gave a hundred guilders to the superintendent of the hospital, so that all the poor inmates should pray for the recovery of Clara Serena Rubens. When they got back, they found the little girl in good spirits. The nurse said jubilantly that she had asked to be lifted into her wheel chair, but she had been able to sit there for only a few minutes. Bella began to cry again, this time with joy. Pieter took her into his arms and encouraged her hopes, although he feared they were in vain.

Clara's birthday fell on March twenty-first. She was now twelve. In the morning all her relatives came to visit her, but no one was allowed to speak to her. Everybody contented themselves with glancing at her from the door. Clara seemed to feel no pain. She lay motionless in her bed; and, if her parents spoke to her, she smiled. In the afternoon an unexpected guest arrived: Ophoven, Pieter's father confessor.

"I have just come from Brussels, Pieter," he said. "I must discuss something confidentially with you."

"I am at your service, father. But first I want to ask you to look at my daughter. She is very ill."

They went up to the living room, where Pieter called Bella from the nursery.

"Bella, Father Ophoven is here. I have asked him to see Clara. I thought that as she seems better just now we had better be prepared for every eventuality."

"You are quite right, Pieter."

They went into the nursery. Ophoven sat down beside the bed, kissed Clara, and heard her confession. She said a few sentences, but what sins could such a sick child have? Then he administered the Last Sacrament. Clara smiled, but she seemed very tired. With a mute gesture she asked for her doll. Pieter gave it to her and then led Ophoven to his study, where they could talk in peace.

"The child seems better," said the priest. "With God's help she will live."

"Both Bella and I are hoping and praying. But what is the confidential matter you mentioned?"

"Do you know where Heusden is?"

"Yes, in Holland."

"And you know who governs the province? No? It's a certain Van Ressel, who is secretly of the Catholic persuasion. There are many Catholics in Heusden. Now this Van Ressel had sent a confidential message to Brussels. Though a loyal servant of the Dutch government, he asserts that he is no longer able to stand by and see the Catholics persecuted. The Archduchess has the idea that with a little skillful persuasion he will come over with the whole of Heusden to us. I have undertaken to act as mediator."

"Is it right to tell me all this, father?"

"I am doing it with the knowledge of Her Highness. To carry out my plan I need a trustworthy Catholic in The Hague. His task would merely be to ascertain Van Ressel's movements, and it would involve no danger."

"I will try to find you someone, father."

At this moment Bella appeared at the door. She did not speak a word, but her tortured face told everything. The two men jumped to their feet.

Pieter tried to lead her from the room, but all the strength seemed to have left her body. She sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. Pieter and the priest went to the child. She was lying alone in the nursery, with not even a servant to watch over her. Apparently only Bella knew what had happened. Clara's face was calm; there was a gentle smile on her lips, as though she were asleep. Pieter put his hand on the still warm snow-white forehead.

"Let us pray," said the priest.

Pieter knelt and clasped his hands. Suddenly there was the sound of a door opening, gay cries and the tramp of feet. Pieter got up and went to the door. The two boys stood before him, cheeks aflame, eyes shining. Nicolaas began to speak loudly and excitedly about some great piece of news he had heard. Pieter thought vaguely what strikingly handsome boys they were.

"Be very quiet now," he said. "Clara is dead. Come in and pray." He took the hands of the startled children and led them into the room.

BOOK THREE

I

EARLY in May the Abbé de Maugis wrote to say that since nine of the pictures were finished Her Majesty insisted upon the artist's coming to Paris at once. Pieter asked Bella whether she felt strong enough after the shock of Clara's death to be left alone; she urged him to go. She seemed to be resigned to the loss of the child and to find some consolation in the splendid health and high spirits of her two sons.

Before he left, he had to pay the usual visits. First he called on Rockox to ask him whether he had any message for Peiresc. The Mayor took his arm and led him across to a collection of coins. It was a new collection which Pieter had never seen before. At the first glance he discovered some rare pieces in it.

"What's this?"

"The collection of the late Duke of Aarschot. I would like to buy it but I haven't got the necessary money. I thought we might offer to sell it in Paris. I'm sure Peiresc can find a customer. Could you take it with you?"

"I'll take it with me now. I shall find time to study it at home. It looks like a most delightful collection."

One day in May he set out for Brussels, traveling in his own carriage drawn by the two Andalusian horses, and followed by a cart containing the baggage. Bella waved her handkerchief from a window, and all the members of the studio gathered at the gate to bid him Godspeed.

In Brussels he sent back the carriage. He stayed in that city for a few days so as to report to the Archduchess. She received him with surprising news.

"Ophoven has been arrested in Heusden on suspicion of engaging in revolutionary activities."

"I hope no harm has come to him."

"Not so far. That two-faced scoundrel, Van Ressel, denounced him, but nothing has been proved against him. He is being confined in The Hague while his case is investigated. Of course, I have done everything in my power to protect him."

"He is a most excellent man, and it would be a great pity if any harm were to befall him. He is my father confessor. He administered the last sacrament to my poor little daughter."

"My good friend, I have been anxious to tell you in person how much I sympathize with you in your loss. Did you receive my letter?"

"Yes, Your Highness, and I was very grateful. I have resigned myself to God's will; my work is a constant source of consolation to me—including the work I am engaged on in Your Highness's service. Indeed one of the purposes of my visit is to ask you what you would like me to do in Paris. Frankly, I do not understand why the wedding of the Prince of Wales has been so long delayed. The ceremony should have taken place long ago."

"You will understand when I tell you the latest intelligence from Madrid. At the command of his father, the Prince went in the greatest secrecy to Madrid instead of to Paris. The English Court had, apparently, decided that a Spanish marriage was after all preferable. The Spanish Court was thrown into great excitement by the news, various factions came into being almost overnight; but the decisive word was spoken by Count Olivarez, who was opposed to such a strong connection with a Protestant state. Yet he was unwilling to alienate England by giving the Prince a completely negative answer, so he assented to the marriage—under certain impossible conditions. He demanded that Catholicism should enjoy the same rights as Protestantism in England and that my niece should still profess the Catholic faith after her marriage, together with the rest of her household. To Olivarez's unbounded astonishment the Prince of Wales accepted these conditions. Apparently England hates Austria so much that it is prepared to pay even such a price to win the friendship of Spain. In these circumstances the Count will have no alternative but to give the Prince an unequivocal negative answer. The Prince will then have to marry the sister of the King of France, and the whole episode will be speedily forgotten. When the Prince goes to Paris, he will discuss the preparations for his marriage with the Princess Henrietta as if nothing had happened. . . . Why are you smiling?"

"I was thinking of poor Breughel. The godfather of his last child is the Archbishop of Milan, and its godmother is the Infanta. When the marriage of the Prince of Wales and the Infanta was being talked of, he already saw himself related by proxy to the future King of England. Poor

man . . . he has fallen on unlucky days. He has become involved in various wild enterprises and lost almost his entire fortune. And his expenses are heavy. His eldest son has just set out for Italy. He is full of worries. . . . I would humbly beg Your Highness to give him whatever assistance lies in your power."

"I will do what I can. But I must tell you that the exchequer is sadly depleted. The war is costing us immense sums of money. . . . If only we could conclude an armistice with Holland. . . . Have you any news from The Hague?"

"I have great news, Your Highness. The 'Catholic' is asking for a brief clarification of our attitude to put before Prince Maurice. My father-in-law brought the news three days ago."

The Archduchess was overjoyed. She immediately sent for Peckius. Pieter then gave a detailed report of the headway Jan Brant had made in his negotiations with the Prince.

"How long are you staying in Brussels?" Peckius asked.

"I am expected in Paris without delay, Your Excellency. But I shall remain in Brussels until I receive the document Brant has asked for."

"Good. I shall draw it up at once and you can send it on to the 'Catholic.' By the time you return from Paris perhaps we shall have a reply."

"I have asked my father-in-law to meet me here on the day of my return. I hope 'Uncle' will have brought the reply by that time."

All three laughed. In their secret correspondence Pieter's father-in-law was called "Uncle," while Jan Brant was known as the "Catholic."

Next day when Pieter called on Peckius he had to wait in the anteroom for a very long time. The Chancellor evidently had a visitor who was most unwilling to take his leave.

"Who is in there?" Pieter asked the secretary.

"Cardinal della Cueva, the new President of the State Council. He has just been sent from Spain to pester us."

At last the representative of Spain in Brussels, a tall, thin, ascetic-looking figure, came out. When Pieter entered, Peckius locked the door.

"It would have meant more than a little trouble if the Cardinal had seen this document. Olivarez is absolutely against any discussion with the Netherlands. He won't hear of any armistice, only of a peace by which Holland recognizes the suzerainty of Spain. But don't worry, Rubens. We

shall go our own way. Read the document at once and then ask me any questions which occur to you."

Pieter read of the desire of the Brussels Court for peace and of the impossibility of any settlement which did not leave the Spaniards at least titular possessors of the Netherlands. It was, however, the opinion of the Brussels authorities that a solution of the problem could be arrived at if both parties agreed to consult each other before taking any decisive step.

"Thank you, Your Excellency. I have no questions. The document is reasonable in tone and admirably clear."

That same day Pieter sent the document to Antwerp with a trustworthy messenger. He then set out for Paris. On his arrival in the French capital he made for the inn he had used on his previous visit. After unpacking he called on Peiresc. Although his friend informed him that rooms and a studio had been reserved for him at the Palais Luxembourg, he did not change his quarters, for the cart containing the pictures had not yet arrived.

At Peiresc's house Pieter met his host's brother, a country squire who proved to be just as cultured and amiable as Peiresc himself. Pieter had not entrusted the collection of coins to the baggage cart, and now they inspected it with great interest. Peiresc proudly showed his own latest acquisitions and suggested that Pieter should prepare drawings of them in order that engravings could be made from them.

The two brothers and Pieter went to an inn for supper. The Provençals discussed the food and the wines with great gusto. But Pieter contented himself with a piece of cheese and a dish of cherries. Throughout the meal they talked politics. They spoke of Tilly's army, which had recovered from its recent defeat and was now marching on Westphalia. When the Prince of Wales's name was mentioned, Pieter asked in a voice which betrayed nothing but mild curiosity, "When does his marriage with the Princess Henrietta take place?"

"It has been postponed," replied Peiresc. "It will not take place for about eighteen months."

Pieter kept discreetly silent about the confidential information he had of the Prince's secret journey to Spain. Next day he moved to the Palais Luxembourg, where the Abbé de Maugis helped to make him at home. The palace was almost empty, for every year at this time the Queen Mother changed her residence to Fontainebleau. The wagon containing

the nine pictures soon arrived. Pieter at once began to fix the pictures in position. The lighting made several small alterations necessary, and he worked on diligently in the studio. He found next that he needed models, and he asked the Abbé to advise him where they were to be found.

"I am sorry, monsieur, but I am unable to be of assistance to you in such matters."

"Of course, I might have known. But can you tell me, Reverend Father, what has become of the sketches I sent to you? They are my property, and I should not like any misunderstanding to arise concerning them."

Pieter was unable to obtain a clear answer from the Abbé, and it was obvious to him that he had urged their completion simply with a view to taking possession of them himself. It was unlikely that Pieter would ever see them again.

Peiresc helped him to find models. Two days later three pretty, dark-haired, vivacious girls arrived at the palace.

"I never thought," said one of them laughing, "that I'd ever undress in the Palais Luxembourg."

"You have a strange accent," Pieter remarked. "Are you Parisiennes?"

"No, monsieur, we are Italians from Naples."

Pieter was glad of the opportunity to speak Italian again. The girls were professional models, two of them sisters, daughters of a man called Capaio; the third was their cousin. Their names were Giulia, Bianca, and Luisa. They established themselves with an air of proprietorship in the palace, and went to their home in the Rue Verbois only to sleep. They brought slippers, wraps, guitars, and Luisa asked leave for her fiancé to visit her during the noon pause, as they had become used to eating together. Pieter readily gave his consent, and every afternoon a thin, dandified little man, the Maître Bernardin—a court clerk—appeared in the studio. So each day there was a jolly party. The girls lay about naked if the weather was warm enough, and seemed not in the least ashamed of their nakedness before Peiresc or his brother, if either of these gentlemen happened to call.

But one day Maître Bernardin had to leave the studio in a hurry, for the Queen Mother appeared without warning. She was accompanied only by her lady-in-waiting, the Princess Guémenée, a courtier, the Marquis Bautru, and, of course, the Abbé de Maugis. The Capaio girls quickly threw on some clothes and retired to one of Pieter's rooms. Her Majesty

greeted the artist with great friendliness and presented him to her retinue. Pieter was astonished by the Princess's beauty; she was red-haired, slim, and tall. The company went to the gallery, where seven pictures were already in position. The first was an allegorical canvas: the Three Fates spinning the life thread of Maria de' Medici. Above them Jupiter and Juno were enthroned in the clouds.

"Oh, how beautiful," cried the Queen Mother, and the retinue were equally enthusiastic.

The second was the allegory of Maria de' Medici's birth. The Queen Mother discovered in it one symbolical allusion after another and was overjoyed at her own perspicacity.

"This is even finer than the first picture," she said.

The third depicted the education of Maria de' Medici; the helmeted Pallas Athene herself guided the girl's writing hand; Apollo played her sweet music on a viol; Mercury brought her wit and a keen mind; the Three Graces proffered her charm and beauty. The fourth showed King Henry IV gazing at her portrait for the first time. The bearded King was standing, clad in armor, on a battlefield. Eros hovered above him offering the portrait, while high above were Jupiter and Juno holding hands, symbolizing the felicity of the marriage to come.

"I am enchanted," cried the Queen Mother. "I knew the pictures would be beautiful, but I didn't dare to hope for so much. Why are the next two spaces empty?"

"Because the one depicting Your Majesty's marriage is still in my studio and the one showing Your Majesty's arrival in Marseilles is not yet ready. . . . But, if Your Majesty will deign to examine the next picture. . . . Up to now I have represented Jupiter and Juno in the clouds, but now the royal couple are enthroned there. By this I wished to show symbolically that the heavens themselves were filled by the rejoicings of the gods at the happiness of the newly married couple."

"Wonderful, Rubens. Wonderful. Each is more beautiful than the other. But there are two more, are there not?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. This shows the birth of His Majesty, Louis XIII. Your Majesty is the chief figure, in all the beauty of a young mother."

"Excellent. The likeness is remarkable."

The others nodded dutifully. The picture did indeed show the features of Maria de' Medici, but strangely, not to say wonderfully, beautified.

Pieter had, in fact, put on canvas the Queen Mother's own conception of herself. One more picture remained: the scene where Henry IV departed for the wars and presented the national insignia to his wife, while the little Dauphin stood looking on.

"My congratulations, Rubens. These are masterpieces. I hope the remaining pictures will be as successful. But tell me, do you approve of the new list of subjects which I have sent to you?"

"May I speak freely?" Pieter asked, glancing at the retinue.

"Yes, you may. Only my most intimate associates are present."

Pieter stepped across to a large sheet and drew it aside.

"At Your Majesty's command I have done this, as I didn't want to seem disobedient; but I'd like Your Majesty not to include it in the series. It is only a sketch in any case."

"What is it? My departure from Paris to Blois?"

"Yes, the picture Your Majesty ordered by letter. But I feel that this canvas with its symbolical figures of Hate and Slander, of Fury and Cunning, is too much out of harmony with the general spirit of the series which Your Majesty discussed with me during my last visit. I should be most grateful if Your Majesty would graciously permit the withdrawal of this painting."

The Queen Mother hesitated. After a lengthy whispered consultation with the Princess and the others, Marquis Bautru turned to Rubens.

"I see you're afraid for your own skin."

"You're mistaken, sir. I'm not speaking from any selfish motive. I shall have plenty of opportunity to see His Majesty in connection with the tapestries; and, if His Majesty inquires about these pictures, I can only answer that I was ordered to paint certain allegories which I, as a foreigner, cannot understand. But I was told that these pictures would first be exhibited at the wedding festivities of the Prince of Wales. Someone is certain to explain them to His Highness. Perhaps His Majesty the King. There is no need for me to say more, as. . . ."

"No, you're right," interrupted the Queen. "But have you any alternative suggestions?"

"A great many, Your Majesty. The triumphs of His Majesty Henry IV. The coronation of Your Majesty. The coming of age of His Majesty Louis XIII. . . . And the series could be finished with a picture entitled 'The Triumph of Justice' in which the King would present his heart to Your

Majesty. How good it would be if His Majesty Louis XIII were to see this last canvas often. . . ."

"You have convinced me, Rubens. . . . I give you a year to finish the rest of the pictures. It is a pity that I cannot see you again; it's rather difficult for me to come to Paris and I have come simply for your sake. And now, if you have finished. . . ."

When his visitors had left, Pieter continued his work; he had several small alterations to make. He had also to report at the royal palace. The King could not receive him but sent him a message that he had inspected the four designs and was greatly pleased with them.

As for the collection of coins, Pieter had no luck. Peiresc showed it to numerous collectors, all of whom admired it but none of whom had sufficient money to buy it. Laujon, the most important collector of Paris, expressed his willingness to acquire part of it. Pieter hit upon the idea of dividing the collection into parts. Laujon would buy one; both Peiresc and Rockox would be willing to take a share. When Pieter started for Flanders, he again had a large bundle of notes in his luggage on which to base his confidential report for Isabella.

He stopped in Brussels, and next day his father-in-law joined him with the report from The Hague. The "Catholic" said that he had presented Peckius's letter to the Prince of Orange. Prince Maurice accepted the secret agreement in writing, but in a long memorandum he expressed his fears that Paris would get to know of these confidential discussions. He also produced many legal arguments to the effect that he could only accept the armistice conditionally, for the States General could never be persuaded to yield on the matter of Dutch independence. But a Dutch-Spanish agreement in the matter of commerce in the East Indies was possible.

Pieter made a long report to the Archduchess both on the Dutch attitude and on the Paris situation. She asked for his notes in order that she might supplement the reports from Baron de Vicq. Peckius was then sent for, and they discussed the answer of Prince Maurice.

The agreement signed by the Prince of Orange surprised both the Archduchess and her Chancellor. The court painter had achieved an immense feat. It was hard to believe that this document was not a forgery—it seemed incredible that Maurice of Orange, well known for his caution and cunning, would let such a thing pass out of his hand. Yet the Prince

had every reason to keep this agreement from the States General and the other European powers; he knew well that the Archduchess would get into deep difficulties if the King of Spain were to discover its existence. After a lengthy discussion Peckius advised his mistress that they should send an immediate reply, informing the Prince that the charge of indiscretion was rather vague; they should also inform him what Spanish interests in the East Indies were on no account to be relinquished.

Pieter received next day the text of this lengthy answer, together with instructions not to let it pass from his hands. Nor was there any need for haste; the fortunes of war seemed strongly to favor the Catholic side, and procrastination would be more effective than precipitate action.

Old Brant had little news from home when he and Pieter set out in the carriage drawn by the white horses. Bella had again been ailing, but it was nothing serious. The two boys were growing rapidly. They talked a great deal about politics—in Latin so that the coachman should not understand them. It was at length agreed that Pieter should go on some pretext to The Hague.

By the time Pieter reached Antwerp, Bella had recovered, and the boys greeted him with noisy delight after his six weeks' absence. Pieter took steps to obtain a passport, but he did not hurry. He wrote to the "Catholic" that he would visit him to discuss his patents, but that his journey was still held up by many obstacles and he was unable to fix a definite date. He did not want to visit The Hague immediately after his return from Paris; that would only have increased Prince Maurice's suspicions. Tilly had won another victory; the Spanish-German troops had defeated the Brunswick army at Stadtlohn. Peckius was right; it would be more advantageous to negotiate with a weakened opponent.

The old Pope had died, and the great struggle of factions which had been held in abeyance during his brief reign, started afresh. The French and Spanish parties were at swords' points again, and the Cardinals were called by their respective sides to Rome. Brussels was especially happy when Della Cueva left for the conclave; his stiff, warmongering attitude and supercilious harshness had made him hateful to everybody. But at the election of the Pope, Richelieu's will triumphed. An extremely talented member of the rich Florentine family of Barberini was chosen Pope; he took the name of Urban VIII. Della Cueva returned to Brussels, beaten and furious.

In September, Pieter received his passport and left for The Hague with a large selection of engravings. The younger Jan Brant was down with the ague, and his father had just had a stroke. When Pieter at last saw the "Catholic," he was asked:

"Why did you go to Paris, Mynheer?"

"I took some pictures to the Queen Mother. Why do you ask?"

"The Prince says that he has a copy of the agreement which was sent to him *from Paris*."

"Have you seen the copy? Don't be childish, you know the Prince. . . . But let's come to the point. I'll read the reply to you—but first I'd better tell you one or two things."

After his discussion with Brant, Pieter visited four different places ostensibly to sell engravings. When he returned to Brussels, he had a long session with his father-in-law and then wrote to Peckius.

Antwerp, 30th September 1623. Your Excellency—I found our Catholic in great sorrow on account of his father's illness which, according to the doctors, is incurable; he himself is suffering from ague. He advised me to send Uncle to Lille on the current matter to give an *ex-propinquo* account of the situation, but I shall try to postpone the visit for a few days. When I told him of our reply, he became greatly excited; he admired the thoroughness and wisdom of the document, and said that a subject could not have been presented with greater skill from so many points of view. Finally he consulted his written instructions and showed me one sentence which I did not like; he is not allowed, it appears, to accept or transmit anything but our outright acceptance or refusal of the armistice. He also suggested that we had made illicit use of the Prince's letters, and sent them to France in order to arouse against him the suspicions of the French King and the States General. I told him that if the Prince would deign to say this flatly in front of Her Highness, her indignation would sufficiently prove her innocence. All these are only tricks and stratagems to provide a loophole of escape from the agreement. But the Catholic stubbornly persisted in his attitude, maintaining that the Prince could produce the copy of the agreement which he had received from the French court. Finally, I convinced him. He decided to copy out our answer in his own hand and give it to the Prince at the first opportunity. He would have done this at once, but I told him it would be better to wait until his fever was past. I retained the document containing our answer and promised to visit him again so that he might draw out the copy in my presence. This reassured him and gained time for us. He also informed me that the secretary of

the Prince, through whose hands the text of the agreement will pass, is a man called Junius who can be bribed; but Uncle is unwilling to win him over in that way, as he considers such methods unworthy. I thought it advisable to inform Your Excellency of this fact. It seems to me most dangerous that the Catholic should visit Brussels himself, as this may arouse the suspicions of Cardinal della Cueva; it would be better if he came to Antwerp, and I would send or bring the answer myself to Brussels. But I do not insist on this as I have no wish to be charged with putting the Catholic into the background to feed my own vanity. It would therefore be advisable if I could show a letter to this effect from Your Excellency. And now I commend myself to Your Excellency's grace and remain,

Your Excellency's humble and obedient servant,

Rubens

Two days later Rockox sent for Pieter.

"There is some money coming to you, Pieter. I have just received a document from Brussels to that effect."

The Archduchess wrote to say that in consideration of his valuable services to His Majesty, the King of Spain, she had decided to grant Pieter Paul Rubens a pension of eight talers a month for the rest of his life.

"What services have you rendered to the King?" asked Rockox, puzzled.

"Well, I carried the fame of the painters of Antwerp to France."

The Mayor seemed to find this reply satisfactory. They discussed the collection of coins, and Rockox undertook to buy one third of it, while Pieter shouldered the laborious task of dividing it up, work which involved the careful valuation of every piece. This meant a considerable financial sacrifice, for commissions were still flowing into the studio. Almost every day brought a request for an altarpiece, or some rich gentleman who wanted a picture or a portrait. Some of these commissions Pieter passed on to his colleagues, but there were certain clients whom he could not refuse. There was, for example, Nicolaas Respaigne, a wealthy merchant who had contracted a strange disease that no doctor could cure. He had been near his end when he decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He returned in a few months, bronzed, rejuvenated, and apparently completely cured. One day he called on Pieter.

"I promised my wife a portrait of myself if I returned cured," he said. "Will you paint it for me for the sake of our old friendship?"

And Pieter could not refuse. Days, weeks, months passed. The time would soon come when the Queen Mother would expect delivery of the rest of the pictures. Pieter worked as he had never worked before. He had to set aside time for his family and his complex business affairs. And he had to journey to Brussels whenever events demanded it.

The political currents were now running against Spain. De Luynes had been dead for two years, and King Louis had appointed Cardinal Richelieu as his minister of state. The Cardinal's first act on coming to power was to protest in Rome against the Spanish right of transit through the Valtellina. He did not waste time in negotiations but sent an express courier to his ambassador in Switzerland with instructions that he should recruit an army from the Swiss. The matter was complicated by the fact that Spain had entrusted to the Papal Guard the task of maintaining her subjects' freedom of travel. But Richelieu made short work of such difficulties. He ordered his new army to attack the Catholics in the Tyrol and the Papal Guard as well. This in effect constituted an attack on Spain.

Pieter was summoned to Brussels by the Archduchess herself.

"The sky is very dark, Rubens," she said. "For fourteen years there has been no trouble with France, and now we must expect a Franco-Spanish war. At any moment we may be attacked by either or both the French and the Dutch. If ever the armistice was important, it is doubly important now. Speak to Peckius. You must urge immediate discussions with The Hague. . . . By the way I owe you gratitude for your report on the Valtellina question after your first visit to Paris. De Vicq's report was quite different, but events have proved you right. Now go and see the Chancellor."

Pieter threw himself heart and soul into his task. The next weeks were spent in frantic work in the studio, secret journeys to a Dutch frontier village, and frequent conferences with Peckius in Brussels. At last his efforts were crowned with success, for Prince Maurice and Peckius reached such a close agreement that now nothing remained to be done but to arrange the terms of the armistice.

Early in June he was once more called to Brussels.

"Peckius has kept me fully informed on what you have done and are still doing for us," said the Archduchess.

"I am doing it for myself and my children, as well, Your Highness."

"That by no means lessens your service. I recently gave you a token of

my gratitude. I know it was a very small sum, but unfortunately I must maintain a very large army. I have chosen another way this time to demonstrate my appreciation."

She rang and said to the courtier who entered. "Tell Chancellor Peckius to come and bring the sword."

Pieter imagined that he was to be given a valuable jeweled sword as a gift. Peckius entered and stood beside the Archduchess's chair. A naked sword lying on a velvet cushion was brought in. The Archduchess raised the sword.

"Pedro Pablo Rubens," she said, her voice rather small and unsteady, "for your diligent and faithful services, His Majesty King Philip IV has decided to create you a noble of Spain. Kneel down."

Pieter, still astonished, did as he was bid. The Archduchess lifted the sword with a clumsy, feminine gesture in her right hand, but then supported it with her left, for it was a large, heavy weapon.

"Don Pedro Pablo, in the name of His Most Catholic Majesty, we hereby pronounce you a knight. May God, the Holy Virgin, and all the saints protect you."

She touched his shoulder lightly with the sword and handed it to the Chancellor. Then she raised the kneeling man, kissed him on both cheeks, and burst into tears.

"How few people there are whom I can trust," she said, still weeping. "Don Pedro, go now to the Chancellery, where you will receive the patent of your nobility. Then come back here."

Pieter followed the Chancellor; he was so astonished by the unexpected honor that he scarcely knew where he was going. Peckius touched him on the shoulder.

"This way, Don Pedro."

Pieter's heart suddenly seemed to contract. He was thinking of his mother.

II

"Good morning, Doña Bella," said Pieter gaily as he entered the house. "How are Don Albrecht and Don Nicolaas?"

"What on earth are you talking about, Pieter?"

"Nothing—except that you have become a Spanish noblewoman. Tomorrow there will be a coat of arms on our carriage, and there won't be any need to send for a painter—I'll paint it myself."

"A coat of arms? You're talking in riddles, Pieter."

After Pieter had explained, Bella tried to look glad, yet something in her face made him uneasy.

"Is anything the matter, my angel?"

"I'm afraid I've been feeling rather unwell recently."

"Are you expecting another baby, Bella?"

"I wish I were. But don't be alarmed. I'm beginning to feel better already, now that you're here."

"Well, naturally, the patent of nobility will scare off all your pains. But, if you still feel poorly in a day or two, I'll send for the best doctor in the country."

"Oh, it's gone already," Bella smiled. "Tell me more about your new honor. Was it quite unexpected?"

"Completely. To be quite frank, Bella, this distinction makes me very happy. Happy on your account, and for the sake of the boys. And I don't mind admitting I'm rather pleased about it myself. It gives me a new encouragement in my work. Perhaps it's just vanity, but the appreciation and the good will of others spur one on."

"You can't work harder than you're doing."

"Not harder, but with greater zest."

Before the midday meal Pieter solemnly called his sons to him.

"Listen, my sons. The King has raised you to the rank of noblemen, and you should be proud of it. But I want to warn you that nobility does not mean merely more privileges, but also more duties. You must be better than your fellows—more diligent, more honest. And now let us eat."

After lunch Bella told him that her best friend, Susanna, the wife of Cornelis de Vos, had complained to her that her husband was doing very badly; he had been able to obtain very few commissions, he had stood surety for a spendthrift, and he was now in serious financial difficulties. Bella felt that it would offend De Vos to offer him a loan, but that if Pieter were to commission him to paint her with Albrecht and Nicolaas the gesture would be greatly welcomed.

Pieter agreed at once, and De Vos accepted the commission with joy. He set up his easel in the drawing room. The picture showed Bella and the boys along with Susanna de Vos and her little daughter. When the picture was finished they unveiled it solemnly. It was hung in the parlor, and now Bella loved to sit in that room more than ever, especially on Sundays when Pieter did no work in the studio, but either played with the children or sat reading in an armchair. Or he would stroll in the garden or about the house, examining his treasures, the rich carpets and rugs, the rare furniture, the statues, the chests filled with coin collections. There was a lion skin, a complete suit of armor dating from the days before gunpowder was invented, an Egyptian mummy. And everywhere books; everywhere pictures—by Van Eyck, Raphael, Ribera, Bronzino, Elsheimer, Holbein, Momper, Massijs, Tintoretto, Veronese, Titian, and many copies he himself had made during his years in Italy. In a room set aside as a gallery were eleven pictures by Breughel senior. All this represented wealth. But there was money as well, several hundred thousand guilders—even Bella didn't know how much.

"Well, I have achieved something," he thought. He was forty-seven, in excellent health, with not a tooth missing; except for the attack of pleurisy in Rome, he had never been ill in his life. There was not a white strand in his hair or his beard; no one would think him a day over thirty-five. He was wealthy and contented. Down in the courtyard the two white Andalusians were stamping impatiently in the harness of a carriage which bore the Rubens coat of arms: a black hunting horn and seven roses in a golden field, and a golden lily in a blue field. But today Bella was not in the mood for a drive.

"The pains have come back again," she complained. "I'd better lie down."

"This is no joking matter, my dear. Tomorrow I shall go to Brussels

and fetch the court physician to have a look at you. I haven't much trust in our local doctors."

The court physician was Jacques Chifflet, a Frenchman from Besançon, a most learned man. He was also interested in literature and was engaged on a history of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The Archduchess gave him two days' leave of absence to examine Bella Rubens. On the journey from Brussels to Antwerp, Pieter and Chifflet discussed medicine, in which the painter showed great interest.

Chifflet examined Bella long and carefully. He asked a hundred questions and noted her answers very carefully. After an hour and a half he at last formed an opinion. He declared that she was suffering from acidity of the stomach. She was to drink red wine regularly and take drops of a silver solution, for silver facilitated the production of the body's natural juices which dissolved the excess acids in the stomach.

When the physician was preparing to return to Brussels, Pieter seized the opportunity to talk to him privately.

"Tell me frankly, Monsieur Chifflet, is my wife's condition serious?"

"I must tell you frankly, that I do not know. I can at present give no final opinion on some of her symptoms. I do not wish you to think that I am infallible or that the science of medicine is all-powerful."

"Do not be modest, monsieur. You possess amazing knowledge."

"Believe me, I am not being modest. I am merely stating the fact that our knowledge of the human body, as of every other subject, is limited. Your wife's malady may be fairly serious, but there is every hope that her healthy constitution will conquer the acids. We can only observe her condition during the next month or so. Do not fail to call on me next time you are in Brussels."

An opportunity to do so soon came, for politics now occupied as much of Pieter's time as painting. Then one day he discovered that his secret political work was no longer so secret as he supposed. It was certain that neither his father-in-law nor Jan Brant the younger had been guilty of any indiscretion. And yet when he met *Sieur de Baugy*, the French Ambassador in Brussels at the gates of the palace, that gentleman said:

"Greetings, monsieur. What news have you of the armistice?"

There was a sneering, somewhat insolent note in his voice.

"How should I know, *Sieur de Baugy*?"

"Who should know if not you?" retorted the Ambassador and passed on.

Pieter at once reported the incident to Peckius, but the Chancellor merely shrugged his shoulders.

"If we consider ourselves wise, that is no reason for thinking others fools."

"But, Your Excellency, I cannot conceive how information about my activities has leaked out. I am prepared to swear that none of my fellow workers has breathed a word."

"That others know of your activities does not necessarily mean that someone has been talking more than he should. Everyone knows that Her Highness receives you often and that you frequently call on me. Vaenius is also a court painter; but he comes to the palace scarcely more than once a year. If we talk of nothing but painting, where are the pictures to show for it? It is a long time since you painted anything for the palace. You often go to The Hague, where it is common knowledge that you have a kinsman. Do you think people are idiots? You must resign yourself to the fact that you are a suspicious character in the eyes of our diplomatic opponents. Sooner or later everyone engaged on confidential political missions becomes suspect. The important thing is always to be discreet. And never carry state documents on your person, for it is by no means unlikely that one day some unknown assailant will knock you on the head from behind simply to go through your pockets. Do not visit The Hague for some time, and don't ask the Catholic to come here. Meet somewhere on the frontier."

"Would it not be wise if I were to paint something for the Court, merely for the sake of appearances?"

"Yes, that's a good idea. This time you must do a battle scene."

"A battle scene? I never paint such subjects. I don't like them."

"Nevertheless, this time you must paint one. Let us say the siege of Breda. I want you to see how Marquis Spinola is conducting operations. And when you are there you can tell him how our negotiations with Prince Maurice are progressing. It is important that he should be kept informed of all the details, and there is no one more qualified to speak of them than you."

"I must go to Breda?"

"Yes. It is the wish of Her Highness that you should inform Spinola in person of the progress of the discussions. You will carry a pass allowing you to enter the camp but no other documents. There is no need for me to tell you precisely what to say to the Marquis. Tell him the truth, in detail. We have no secrets from him."

Although work awaited him at the studio, Pieter could not refuse to comply with the Chancellor's request. He called on Doctor Chifflet to inform him that Bella's condition was unchanged and that she was continuing to follow his instructions to the letter. Chifflet said that she would have to be patient and continue with the cure. Pieter returned to Antwerp and at once set out for the besieged town.

This was the first time he had been close to the scene of war. Breda was a Dutch fortress on the banks of the Mark; and, as it stood at the end of an important military road, it had been besieged more than once. The first sign of the war was the ruins of a burned farm. Here Pieter was already on Dutch soil, for the Spanish army had crossed the frontier in order to attack Breda. Pieter looked at the charred ruins for a long time. As he proceeded, he came upon more and more signs of devastation, and at last the carriage rumbled into a village which had been razed to the ground. Some of the inhabitants had stayed behind among the ruins of their homes: the roofs had been patched up with branches and foliage to keep out the rain. Dogs ran after the cart, children played in the street. When he came to the church, he found a pile of stones that nobody had troubled to clear away. The whole scene was outlined in soft tones by the autumn sunshine. It was infinitely sad, as if nature were grieving over the insanity and wickedness of man.

Suddenly crossed lances barred his way. Pieter presented his pass, but the soldiers could not read, and it was some time before a literate sergeant could be found. He saluted smartly and allowed Pieter to pass. The road became increasingly busy; tents appeared; a gun was being dragged toward Breda. Descending a hill, Pieter entered the camp of the besiegers, its different sections marked out by flags; beyond, the battlements of the fortress of Breda shone in the sunshine. Guards again stopped him, and he was conducted on foot by two soldiers to the general's tent. This stood on the side of a hillock, out of range of the guns of Breda. A young officer surveyed the newcomer with a supercilious stare. But after glancing at Pieter's pass he immediately became most respectful.

"His Excellency has gone for a ride," he said in Spanish. "Will you be kind enough to wait here?"

There was a bench near the entrance to the tent, and Pieter sat down. He looked about him curiously. This particular war didn't seem horrible in the least; on the contrary, there was something commonplace and even boring about it. Soldiers stood about in groups gossiping; two were engaged in a mock boxing match, laughing loudly. A group sat beneath a tree throwing dice. A man sat alone darning a torn coat; several were asleep. There was a light breeze; a lark soared over the camp. Nowhere was a gun to be seen, nor any echo of the din of war.

In twenty minutes the general arrived. His armor shone, his helmet gleamed like a mirror. Pieter realized that this was the first suit of armor he had seen in the camp. As Spinola approached the tent, Pieter rose to meet him.

"Rubens, what brings you here?"

"I have been waiting for you, Your Excellency. I have come from Brussels on a special mission."

Spinola jumped from his horse, pressed Pieter's hand, and led him into the tent. Inside it was divided into several compartments by curtains. The floor was covered with fine carpets, and the place was furnished like any luxurious town dwelling.

"I don't want anyone to be near the tent," said Spinola to the young officer. "I shall be engaged in a private conference with Don Pedro Rubens for some time."

The officer left, and Spinola offered Pieter a chair and placed a flagon of Venetian wine and glasses on the table. He then took off his helmet, unbuckled his breastplate, and made himself comfortable.

"Well, how far have you got with that cunning dog?" he said.

Ambrogio Spinola had a curious face. He had a sloping forehead, a thin, reddish beard, a mustache of the same color, a long nose, and red, full lips. From time to time he licked his lips like a fox watching a hen run. He came of a wealthy Genoese trading family and had paid handsomely for his present high position. Pieter watched him with a painter's eye while he talked with a politician's wariness. He related all that had happened, concluding with the latest report from Brant, according to which the Prince was now ready to restrict Dutch trade with the East Indies to a certain extent, but was afraid that the States General would

not accept such a policy. Spinola displayed a surprising knowledge of diplomatic detail; he was less like a grim general than a skillful politician. He talked about imports, colonial products, the possible shortening of sea routes. Then he turned to the question of the siege and asked Pieter to tell the Archduchess that Breda might hold out for months; nevertheless, as the siege occupied the attacking forces of the Dutch, it had its uses. He politely recalled the months which Pieter had spent, as a member of Duke Vincenzo's retinue, in the Spinola's palace at Sampierdarena.

"I received your beautiful book on the Genoa palaces with much pleasure. Let me show my gratitude by giving you a taste of my profession. I didn't plan any artillery action today, as I am saving my gunpowder; but in your honor I'll send a few cannon balls over at Breda."

Pieter was about to protest but thought it better to swallow his dislike of martial action. Spinola put on his breastplate and helmet again, and buckled on his sword. He called, gave a few orders to the officer who entered, and led his guest outside, where some officers and two saddled horses were waiting. They mounted, and the horsemen set out. In ten minutes they reached a saddle between two hills, where there was a thin group of poplars. There they dismounted and walked on until the whole landscape opened before them with the fortress in the center.

"You'll see everything from here. The bombardment will start in a little while."

To one side Pieter observed the besieging batteries. He observed how the breach was loaded and the cannon balls were carried up. The match flared in the hand of a soldier. He touched it to the breach. There was a tremendous explosion, and the cannon recoiled.

"Watch the fortress."

A grayish flash appeared on the broad, battlemented wall where the ball had struck. Then came another explosion, a third, a fourth. Each was followed by a corresponding flash and cloud of dust on the distant wall. But the wall did not budge. Spinola gave an order. There was a short bugle call close to them. The explosions came from a different direction now. Spinola touched Pieter's arm:

"Look! On the left there, above the second bastion."

Something reddened there. At first it was hardly visible, then it grew rapidly. In a few minutes it became a roaring fire: some building was burning. Pieter stared at it, his throat suddenly dry. He thought that that

building may have been planned with care and affection, erected with great labor, to create something where nothing had been before. And now the action of a single moment had destroyed the fruit of long care and labor. Perhaps there was some human being where the ball had struck, lying with his entrails torn open, blood spattering his body, screaming in agony. . . . And all the time the sun was shining brightly, and Pieter's children were playing cheerfully at home. Who was responsible for all this? Who should be punished for this crime? The Spaniards? They were demanding only the legal and rightful inheritance of their King. The Dutch? They only wanted the freedom to which everybody was equally entitled. Who could do justice here? There was only one thing to be done: to work with all his might for peace.

A bugle sounded. The gunfire stopped. They walked back through the trees and mounted again. So this was what the siege was like—utterly different from the picture Pieter had formed in his mind. And, while he rode back, the strange thought obsessed him that war was not only terrible but boring.

He proceeded to Brussels again, returned to Antwerp, and was alarmed to discover that the pictures for the French Court would not be ready in time. He had no alternative but to write to Paris and ask for a postponement of the delivery. But he received an impatient answer: the wedding of the Prince of Wales was to take place next May, and by that time the gallery must be completely finished. So he threw himself into the work and surpassed himself. He finished the remaining pictures, except for some portraits which he could paint only in Paris, where the originals were available; he also required the Capaio girls to pose as naiads in the painting of Maria Medici's disembarkation at Marseilles—he could not find such good models in Brussels.

By New Year's Day he was almost ready to leave for Paris. He wrote to Peiresc asking him to make his studio ready for him and engage the Capaio girls. In the meantime, as Bella's condition had not improved, he sent once more for Dr. Chifflet. The famous physician had nothing new to say; he agreed that there was no improvement, but he told Pieter that he could go away without undue anxiety. In the midst of his packing Pieter's father-in-law paid him an unexpected visit.

"Do you know that man De Bye who is Secretary in the Fiscal Department?"

"Yes, a rather self-important man who likes to meddle in everybody's business. A rather indiscreet man."

"Well, last night he got drunk in the company of some of my clerks, and they've told me what he said. Mynheer de Bye was discussing the armistice."

"The Secretary of the Fiscal Department? Discussing the armistice? It sounds fantastic."

"Wait, here's the slip of paper on which I noted down the names. Who is Toiras?"

"Toiras? A captain of the Guards in Paris, a favorite of Louis XIII."

"I see. De Bye has some French friend who is in close contact with Toiras. De Bye has conceived the wonderful idea of getting Louis XIII to force the armistice on The Hague. 'Mynheer Rubens won't be thought such a great politician if *I* succeed in settling the armistice.' That's what De Bye said. He was drunk, of course. What have you to say to that?"

"That all Brussels and Antwerp are talking about our discussions. We cannot delude ourselves that they are secret, you know."

"I know. But isn't it fantastic that De Bye should talk in that way in a tavern?"

"Well, Holland is being incited against us by France. Paris is glad that Spain is at war, for that keeps her mercenaries under arms at immense cost and weakens her sea commerce. It is quite certain that Richelieu is sending money to Prince Maurice. If the King is influenced by his favorites—such as Toiras—he may withdraw his support of Holland and drive them into making an armistice. It is not an impossibility. King Louis cannot change French foreign policy. Only Richelieu's will counts in France. Nor is it possible for Richelieu to take a step in foreign policy that favors Spain, no matter who tries to influence him. But in any case I'm most grateful for this information. I shall find out in Paris who is the friend of our Antwerp Fiscal Secretary, and if he can influence the King's favorite. But it would be better still if I could discover his name here in Antwerp. Have you any trustworthy friend who can hold his liquor? You have? Well, let him take De Bye to a tavern, make him drunk, and find out the name of his French friend. We'll foot the bill."

Three days later Brant sent a slip of paper to his son-in-law in a sealed envelope. There was a name on the paper: Fugnier. Pieter hid it carefully and went on with his preparations. But, on the day before he planned to

leave, Jan Breughel's maid came into the studio, shedding copious tears.

"Mynheer, come at once; my master is very poorly."

On the way the girl told Pieter that Breughel, his son, and his three daughters were all down with dysentery.

The impoverished house looked awful with the heavy atmosphere of sickness in every airless room. Breughel was lying in the studio. He seemed very feeble.

"Pieter," he whispered, "thanks . . . you've come . . . I'm dying . . . lost my fortune . . . this terrible anxiety . . . promise me that you will look after my children. . . ."

"Of course, Jan. But I hope you won't need me to do that for a long time yet."

But the dying man did not reply. He had lost consciousness, and the doctor told Pieter to leave quickly as it was dangerous to expose himself to the infection. Next morning he heard that Breughel had died without recovering consciousness. His son might recover, but the three daughters were dying. Pieter at once sent a nurse from the St. Elizabeth Hospital, provided money for the running expenses, and asked Cornelis de Vos to look after the unhappy family during his absence.

Just before his departure, Ophoven called on him. He had undergone eight months' imprisonment in a Dutch jail, and had only recently been released. It had turned out that the Governor of Heusden had prepared a trap for the Brussels Court when he expressed his willingness to change allegiance. As soon as Ophoven had called on him, soldiers had appeared to arrest him, and the Dominican could not deny his activities. Prison had been a hard trial, but he was in good spirits: the Archduchess had given him a bishopric in compensation for his sufferings.

Pieter took an apprentice with him called Van Egmont. He stopped for a half day in Brussels to pay his respects to the Archduchess and Peckius. On the evening of February the fourth he passed through the Paris customs. His quarters were ready for him at the Luxembourg. As he did not find Peiresc at home, he called on his brother and had a long talk with him. Pieter asked casually:

"I've heard of a certain Monsieur Fugnier. Do you happen to know him?"

"He's a scoundrel. Have nothing to do with him. He has the worst

possible reputation, he's been mixed up in blackmail and every sort of dirty business. Has he approached you?"

"Oh no, I don't know him at all."

"Well, don't try to. Now he's deep in some intrigue with Prince Neuburg, who is soon to come to Paris."

Pieter's heart missed a beat. The Prince of Zweibrücken-Neuburg, his great patron, was much occupied with politics, as he claimed title to the small Duchy of Jülich. He had asked for the help of the Brussels Court and had visited Antwerp on that occasion and called at the Rubens studio, where so many pictures had been painted for him. Pieter felt he was on the right scent at last. But he asked indifferently:

"What is Prince Neuburg doing in Paris? I know him quite well."

"Some say he would like to bring about an armistice between Holland and Spain with the help of the French government. But I am not sure whether the rumor is true or not."

Pieter's brain worked rapidly while he told his host of the latest books published in Flanders. Now he knew what had happened: a second-rate adventurer had established a connection through the fiscal Secretary in Antwerp with the distinguished, rich, but simple Prince of Neuburg. He must stop this underhand and dangerous business in time.

III

The Capaio girls appeared at the studio at the appointed time. The Abbé de Maugis always sent word in advance of his intended visits, for it would have ill befitted his priestly dignity to be in the company of naked girls. The fat little priest was at first strangely embarrassed, for he was still unable to produce the sketches. But Pieter had given up all attempts to recover them; he knew now that the Abbé would never be able to produce them in spite of his promises and excuses: he had probably sold them.

On the second day the Queen Mother sent for him and inquired eagerly when she could inspect the new pictures. She did not have to wait long: except for a few which were unfinished, they were already in position in the gallery. Maria de' Medici was lavish in her praise—and her childish vanity prevented her from finding the pictures too flattering.

Now only her portrait had to be painted. After a lengthy discussion she chose a black dress. Then she made herself comfortable in an armchair and was soon in the middle of an animated conversation with the artist. Pieter guided it cautiously, for he wanted to gather as much information as possible. He mentioned that after the success of the tapestries the King had commissioned him to paint a portrait of the young Queen.

"You had better be careful to flatter her," the Queen Mother said. "Her Majesty, my daughter-in-law, is not exactly a beauty."

"I hope that my humble work will please not only Their Majesties but also their retinue. I have found, Your Majesty, that courtiers can often make or break an artist. I wanted to ask Your Majesty's advice about this. Would it be advisable for me to win the good will of Captain Toiras?"

"Toiras? He is no longer important. The King has become bored with him and is returning to La Rochelle to command his army. The new favorite is Barradas. I don't know him well, but Richelieu says that he is a very pleasant fellow."

"Then it must be so. I hear that His Eminence is an excellent judge of character."

"Oh yes, and a most loyal follower of mine. It is France's great good fortune that he is head of our government."

"I am sorry that I have had no opportunity yet of meeting His Eminence."

Of course Pieter expected that the Queen Mother would at once offer to arrange an audience for him with the Cardinal. But she merely said:

"He is much occupied and has no time for private interviews."

"Well, I shall not give up hope of paying my respects to him sooner or later. They speak much of His Eminence in Antwerp, especially in connection with the Valtellina."

"He handled that matter most skillfully—not like your government. The Spanish have already yielded."

"I should be most interested in His Eminence's opinion of the gallery."

"I'm sure he will be as delighted as everyone else. But let us stop now; I am tired."

As he had decided to inform him of the strange plans of De Bye, the same day Pieter called on Baron de Vicq. The Baron was furious.

"This is incredible," he cried. "The Spanish Netherlands have only one official representative in Paris—myself. And now a German prince suddenly starts meddling with my work. What authority has this Zweibrücken-Neuburg? It is unthinkable that the Archduchess has entrusted him with any mission without my knowledge. I have heard nothing of any discussions between Brussels and The Hague other than the notes exchanged with the States General. There have been no secret attempts to fix an armistice."

"Of course not," Pieter lied.

"I hardly think that Her Highness will like this. I think we had better investigate the matter carefully, and when we have unmasked this amateurish nonsense report it to Her Highness."

Pieter was well satisfied with this idea. Both he and the Baron tried to obtain reliable reports about the Paris activities of Zweibrücken-Neuburg. De Vicq used his diplomatic connections, Pieter took advantage of the Queen Mother's visits. The Queen was usually accompanied by the Marquis de Bautru or the pretty Princess Guéménée. It rested with Pieter's skill to guide the conversation, and he could usually steer it toward politics. When he had finished the Queen Mother's portrait, his opportunities for collecting confidential information became even more numerous, as

The Coronation of the Queen had to include portraits of those noble ladies and gentlemen who had originally attended it. It was the task of De Maugis to bring them to the studio, where duchesses and countesses now took the place of the Capaio girls, who were sent on a ten days' vacation. By the time the picture of the coronation was finished, Pieter had succeeded in gathering full information about the De Bye affair; and, when he compared it with that of De Vicq, they found that both had reached the same conclusion. Fugnier, on receiving a large sum from Zweibrücken-Neuburg, had influenced Louis XIII through Toiras; Richelieu was about to give an official authorization to the Prince to discuss the armistice with the Dutch. De Bye was coming to Paris to join the Prince. The time had obviously come for Pieter and De Vicq to make their report to Isabella.

"It would be better," the Baron said, "if you were to write the letter—I might be suspected of simple jealousy in the matter."

Pieter was himself in the same position, but as he did not want De Vicq to know anything about his secret missions, he kept silent and wrote a long letter describing in detail the preliminaries of the strange affair. Then he suggested in De Vicq's and his own name that De Bye should be kept in Brussels, and that the Archduchess should ask Prince Zweibrücken-Neuburg to consult her before taking any new step.

The Ambassador dispatched the letter by special courier, and now there was nothing to do but wait for the Archduchess's answer. In the meantime Pieter continued his work, finishing the picture of Maria Medici's arrival at Marseilles and also portraits of her parents, the Grand Duke Francesco Medici and the Archduchess Joan of Hapsburg. This completed the series, and now the gallery could be opened to visitors.

The Queen Mother held a special reception. Only members of the two royal households and distinguished diplomats were invited. Pieter found opportunity to win the favor of the Marquis de Bautru, who was in charge of the arrangements, by submitting numerous ideas while giving the Marquis the credit for them. Two hours before the reception, the Queen Mother had a last brief talk with the artist.

"Watch the ladies. We have had many talks about feminine beauty—now I want to know whom you, the painter, consider the most beautiful. Be there in good time, for I feel lost without you."

At the appointed hour one carriage after another drove up to the Palais

Luxembourg. The guests passed between rows of liveried lackeys up the magnificent staircase. A hidden orchestra played softly. At the entrance to the gallery the Queen Mother received the guests. Pieter was standing in a corner, watching the crowd. It was a magnificent spectacle. The fashionable colors of the year were yellow, gray, and green; the ladies were dressed in fabrics worth a small fortune. Paris society gave the strangest names to the different materials; one was called "poisoned monkey," a second, "sick Spaniard," a third, "gay widow"; there was also a "monk's paunch," "smallpox color," and many others. The ladies resembled colored bells, dressed as they were in wide skirt and tightly laced bodices; the gentlemen wore silk stockings with rich tassels below the knee, and all of them observed the curious new vogue in wigs. Everybody's hair was curled and reached to the shoulder; only dignitaries of the Church showed their own hair.

Suddenly the music stopped. A whisper ran through the gathering—the royal couple had arrived. The leading dignitaries of the Court formed a semicircle. At the same moment Baron de Vicq stopped for a second at Pieter's side and whispered:

"Prince Zweibrücken-Neuburg has given up his mission. Her Highness approves of our suggestion; we have triumphed."

The next moment Louis XIII, the twenty-four-year-old King, appeared at the top of the staircase with his young wife, behind him his sister, Princess Maria Henrietta, his brother, Prince Gaston, Richelieu, and a captain of the Guards. The whole company made a deep ceremonial curtsy: the multicolored sea curled in a silent single wave. The Queen Mother kissed her sons, her daughter, and daughter-in-law; after exchanging a few words with each of them, she addressed Richelieu. The young Queen was dressed in black velvet which admirably suited her ash-blond hair; her immense, starched ruff surrounded her pale face like a fan-shaped shell; her lovely hands were free of jewelry, but she wore a diamond necklace and diamonds the size of walnuts dangling from her ears. Maria Henrietta was in a light gray dress; her curly dark head turned vivaciously now in this, now in that direction. The King addressed the English Ambassador, asking him anxiously whether the arrival of the Prince of Wales was likely to be delayed and whether the illness of King James gave any cause for anxiety. Gaston, the Duke of Orléans, lounged against a column, talked loudly and showed little respect for the presence

of his royal brother. Richelieu drew aside the Spanish Ambassador and paid no attention to anyone else. This was the first time Pieter had seen the Cardinal, who wore a purple robe with a broad violet collar. The most characteristic feature of his face was his large, slightly hooked nose. He wore no wig, his hair being brushed straight back.

The King, after a word to everyone, returned to his mother. This was the sign that the pictures could now be viewed. The Queen Mother took her son's arm. She was followed by the Queen, Maria Henrietta, the Duke of Orléans, Richelieu, and the Marquis de Bautru. Behind them the rest of the company followed in a compact crowd. Bautru nodded, and Pieter stepped forward. The Marquis presented him to everybody.

"I know Rubens," the King said. "He has done excellent work for me; I can hardly believe he could surpass it."

"We shall see, Sire," the Queen Mother said, a little pettishly.

The Queen, the Princess, and Duke Gaston merely nodded when Pieter was introduced. Richelieu, with a bored face, gave him his hand to kiss, talking all the time to someone else. The company stopped before the first picture. The Queen Mother began to explain it with great enthusiasm; the members of her family nodded politely; Richelieu remained cold and silent. They passed on to the second, third, and fourth pictures. Here the King showed a livelier interest.

"Oh, my poor father. Excellent! This is how he lives in my memory. This is really a masterpiece."

Pieter bowed deeply. Now the fair-haired Queen spoke.

"He's going to paint me next. I'm really excited."

"If I succeed, it will be a lovely picture, Your Majesty."

The Queen Mother made some explanatory comment at each picture. When they reached the tenth, depicting her coronation, a slight frown passed over the King's face. He did not speak, nor did he make any comment about the canvasses celebrating the glories of his mother's rule. Then came the picture showing her escape from Blois.

There was a tiny silence. Then the King smiled a little crookedly.

"I didn't know, Mother, that angels held the torches for you at Blois. But perhaps we had better pass on."

The most delicate moment had passed. The King was visibly bored by the pictures, which showed his reconciliation with his mother, but praised them politely. At "The Triumph of Justice" he asked with apparent relief:

"There are no more, are there?"

"Three more, Sire, your grandparents and yourself."

Louis XIII inspected them dutifully. He exerted himself to lavish praise on his mother's portrait. Then he turned to the artist:

"My congratulations, Rubens, this is very fine work. I hope the portrait of the Queen will also be worthy of your fame."

"It will be the best I can do, Sire."

The King passed on through the entrance of the gallery which they had reached in their circuit. Pieter stayed behind to greet some dignitaries whom he knew and to be introduced to others. He was surrounded, fêted, overwhelmed with compliments. He tried to remember faces, names, features. He was especially struck by a lady called Madame d'Escoumette. She was a dark, voluptuous beauty with a perfect figure. He pondered whether this was not the most beautiful of all the ladies. They exchanged a few words; the black-haired beauty was friendly and polite, but her eyes conveyed a more interesting message. Someone tapped his arm with a fan. He turned and faced Princess Guémenée.

"Well, Rubens, is it nice to be as famous as you are?"

"It is, Madame. But chiefly useful."

"Why useful?"

"A famous man saves a great deal of time by not being under the necessity to introduce himself. A man's fame is like a woman's beauty."

"Neatly put. I hope to see you again this evening."

Pieter went in search of Baron de Vicq. He was stopped by ten different people before he found him.

"Well, it's our triumph, Rubens," the Baron said. "The Prince of Zweibrücken-Neuburg won't have any hand in the armistice. He has lost the money he gave to Fugnier—but it serves him right."

Pieter nodded. Then he asked for the news from Brussels. De Vicq told him that the Archduchess had handled the whole business with tact and firmness. Pieter thought that it might be useful if he could meet the Prince of Orange personally, but kept this opinion to himself.

The royal couple left early, and the guests began to disperse. Pieter watched them and saw Madame d'Escoumette, engrossed in a lively flirtation with a black-wigged courtier. Princess Guémenée glanced back from the door and gave him an intimate look; then her magnificent red hair vanished in the crowd.

"Well, Rubens," the Queen Mother said when they were alone, "whom did you think the most beautiful of my ladies?"

"The Princess Guémenée, Your Majesty; her beauty is beyond comparison."

"Well, our tastes seem to be identical. What do you say to our success? I am delighted with it. I shall rest happily tonight."

"I beg to congratulate Your Majesty; it was certainly a great triumph. But a Medici was bound to arrange such a ceremony with consummate taste."

"Don't be too modest; you, too, had some part in it. . . . I hope you aren't going to leave Paris?"

"With Your Majesty's leave I shall now paint the portrait of Her Majesty the Queen; and, if there is no urgent news from Antwerp, I should like to wait until the wedding festivities."

"You may stay as long as you like. You must paint the Queen here in my palace."

"That would be most convenient, Your Majesty. But I cannot myself make such a request. I should be most grateful if Your Majesty would propose it."

This put Maria de' Medici into a quandary. She said that she would see about it and then dismissed the painter.

In the end, of course, he painted the portrait in the royal palace. Queen Anne wore the same dress she had worn at the reception at the Luxembourg. Then Pieter painted another portrait of her in a different dress. The royal lady was taciturn and reserved. But Pieter found a way to thaw her icy reserve.

"I cannot help seeing in Your Majesty's face a resemblance to His Majesty Philip III, whom I once met."

"You met my father? Oh, you must tell me about it. Where did you meet him?"

"I was once court painter to the Duke of Mantua, Your Majesty, and conveyed some gifts from my master to Valladolid. . . ."

"Oh, Valladolid. . . . I was only a child when I left there . . . and I haven't seen my parents or Spain since . . . tell me everything. . . ."

Pieter talked vividly about his Spanish memories. The Queen listened, as if she were afraid of missing a single word. At the third sitting she, too, talked, though haltingly. Her words betrayed the hopeless agony of a

woman who felt she was caged. She had been torn from her home and lived now in an atmosphere of hostility to Spain. If there was a war, she would have to pray for the defeat of the King of Spain, her own brother.

The day that he finished the second portrait there was great anxiety at Court, for the news had reached Paris that James I of England had died. But people were reassured when a special courier brought word that the Prince of Wales, now Charles I, would visit the French capital after he had taken over the reins of government, and that the wedding would not be postponed. The new King presently suspended court mourning so that the necessary festivities could take place.

He arrived with a huge retinue. His ceremonial entry into Paris brought the whole population into the streets. The coaches were bombarded with flowers; all the bells of Paris were ringing.

"A man after your heart is coming to Paris, Madame," said Pieter to Princess Guémenée when they met on the staircase of the palace. "The Duke of Buckingham."

"Do you mean I ought to like him because he is a Duke?"

"No, but I hear that he is a handsome and distinguished man."

"Very well," laughed the Princess. "I'll take a look at him."

But Pieter managed to see the Duke before the Princess. One day the lackey announced:

"Monsieur Gerbier would like to pay his respects. He says he is a painter and a native of Flanders."

"Show him in at once."

A gentleman entered, dressed according to English fashion, with an excellent address and smooth manners. He explained that he had left Flanders early in life and had entered the service of the Duke of Buckingham both as a painter and a secretary. His Grace had found out that Rubens was in Paris and desired to commission a portrait; in any case, he was anxious to meet the great artist.

"I shall make time to undertake the commission," Pieter replied. "I'm very tired, but I need the money. It will be necessary to warn His Grace that I am an expensive painter."

"His Grace is not interested in the financial side of the matter. Tell me the amount you usually ask for an equestrian portrait and His Grace will pay it. Will you be so good as to call on him? He is an impatient man and likes his wishes to be fulfilled at once."

"I shall be delighted to pay my respects, but would it not be better if His Grace came here? I have a comfortable studio, and His Grace could inspect the pictures I have painted for the Queen Mother."

"There will be no difficulty about that, but first you ought to call on him, and it will not be a short visit either. He loves to talk politics."

Peiresc's brother laughed. Gerbier glanced at him in surprise.

"My friend is laughing at me, monsieur," Pieter hastened to explain, "because I am similarly inclined. When does His Grace wish me to pay my respects?"

Next day Pieter was admitted to His Grace's presence after a short wait. The Duke of Buckingham was a very handsome man, though somewhat soft and effeminate. His mouth was too red, his large fine eyes showed false amiability, his lips greediness for pleasure. When he asked Pieter what language he preferred to talk in, Pieter replied that it was a matter of indifference to him.

"But the subject isn't, is it?" His Grace smiled, speaking in French. "I hear that you like to talk politics."

"I'm only a painter, but I am deeply interested in the fate of my country. And England has a great deal to say in her fate. I should be very happy if one of England's greatest statesmen would tell me how his country judges the situation in the Spanish Netherlands."

"I hope you won't take offense, but for us it is a minor question. The essential problem for us is that of our relations with Spain, which are not too good at the moment. His Majesty, my master, did not receive the welcome at the Spanish Court he had expected. And I do not care to whom you say this."

Soon they were deep in political discussion. The Duke explained that the anti-Catholic policy of England was bound to change through the King's marriage to a Catholic princess. Nor should it be impossible to find a just balance in the rivalry between England and Spain. Pieter was amazed to hear one of the most intimate councilors of the King of England discussing so freely the fundamental lines of his policy before a mere painter and in the first half hour of their acquaintance.

"War is the greatest curse God can send on mankind, Your Grace," he said at last. "Every honest man must work for the return of peace."

"No doubt, but it isn't always easy. I, too, want peace if possible."

"That 'if possible' always means war, Your Grace."

"You put it neatly," the Duke laughed. "But we keep on talking politics instead of discussing my portrait. I'd like to start the sittings tomorrow—would nine o'clock in the morning do? Excellent. Leave the financial side of the matter to me, you won't be disappointed."

Next morning, in Gerbier's presence, they continued their political discussion. Pieter listened carefully and made copious notes after each sitting. He discovered that it was Buckingham who had persuaded the King of England to give up his stubborn insistence on the Spanish marriage and wed the sister of the French King. He was amazed at the pomp the Duke displayed in his dress. He had brought twenty-seven suits to Paris; the cheapest of them cost thirty-five thousand francs, while the gala dress he planned to wear at the royal wedding was valued at half a million. He loved to discuss his amorous adventures, was greatly interested in Pieter's models and exceedingly vain of his personal appearance, and hinted frequently at his immense wealth. On the other hand there was much that was likable in him, and he had a refreshing boyish frankness and simplicity. After the picture was finished, a huge box arrived at Pieter's lodgings filled with silver plates and centerpieces. The Abbé de Maugis offered two thousand gold pieces for them, but Pieter refused to part with them.

A few days later Pieter received the Queen Mother's permission to visit Fontainebleau. He made up a party: Princess Guémenée, the younger Peiresc, the Abbé, and himself. The Queen Mother sent a gilded state coach to take them to her summer palace. Pieter sat next to the Princess and discovered that she enjoyed his company. The galleries of Fontainebleau, with their innumerable Raphaels, Leonardos, and Michelangelos, enchanted Pieter. He spent a long time in front of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, admiring her mysterious beauty. The Princess turned to Pieter:

"Tell me, monsieur, what is the secret of this enchanting picture?"

"The question answers itself. Its fascination lies in its mystery. We are always attracted by the unknown."

"Sometimes we are attracted by someone we know," she said, and looked into his eyes.

Pieter felt a hot shiver run through his body. The others had not heard the Princess's words. All the way back to Paris, Pieter was filled with a nervous disturbance. He closed his eyes and thought of the woman so close to him, trying to imagine she was far away. It was the first time in

his sixteen years of married life that he had desired another woman. He felt he would be unable to conquer his desire. He would have to entrust his fidelity to blind accident: he would not woo her, he would wait. His desire would be consummated only if fate willed it.

Almost every day some new foreign notability arrived for the wedding. The guests brought fresh news from distant countries. And one day Paris was shocked by the report that Prince Maurice was dead. Pieter was surprised that the news touched him so deeply. And, when he tried to discover the reason, he found it among his dim childhood memories, when for a time he had believed himself to be the half brother of the Prince of Orange. He had always been interested in Prince Maurice. Yet they had never met. Now the secret negotiations for the armistice would have to be started afresh. The role of Prince Maurice was taken over now by his younger brother, Prince Frederick Henry, of whom little was known. New contacts, new avenues of approach would have to be found. . . .

The wedding reception took place on the eighth of May, and Pieter received an invitation. The royal palace was crowded; Pieter caught a glimpse of Princess Guémenée but soon lost her again. He tried in vain to find her; at last he pushed his way through the crowd and went home. But he could not sleep. The Princess filled his thoughts.

The wedding ceremony took place on May 14 at Notre Dame. Pieter was there with the younger Peiresc two hours before it began, yet they had great difficulty in reaching their appointed places. At last they found themselves in the gallery reserved for foreign diplomats. They could not see the altar, only the central nave, but that would give the best view of the procession. The heat was unbearable. The organ began to play. There was an excited craning of necks; the wedding procession had arrived. Pieter had never seen such a dazzling sight before. The Kings of England and France, the Queen Mother, the Queen of France, the Prince of Orléans, the descendants of Bourbons, Hapsburgs, Medicis, Stuarts walked there in all the pride of their rank. A low murmur greeted each figure in the long procession; and, when the Duke of Buckingham arrived, covered with diamonds and precious stones, there was a long-drawn sigh of astonishment. The sound of the organ filled the ancient nave.

At that moment Pieter felt the gallery swaying beneath him and heard

a splintering, rending sound. Instinctively he grasped the banister. There was a resounding crash, followed by frantic screams which drowned the sound of the organ. Part of the gallery had collapsed; one of the supporting columns had broken in two just at Pieter's side and some people had fallen into the nave. The music of the organ swelled, drowning the screams of pain. Pieter watched the scene, holding on to the banister: men were extricating themselves from the pile of broken scaffolding; it was impossible to say if anyone had been killed. The staircase was still intact. As the younger Peiresc had been among those who were hurled down, Pieter fought his way through the crowd, hoping to find him. Soldiers were standing at the front of the stair, repelling with the shafts of their halberds everyone who tried to pass. An unconscious man was being carried outside; he had been dragged from beneath the fallen heap of planks and beams. In the meantime the organ played on, and the wedding ceremony continued. Those at the altar must have been unaware of the accident. Pieter now saw his friend, who was trying to get to his feet, disheveled and spattered with blood. He took his arm.

"I must have broken my ankle," the Provençal said painfully, "or badly sprained it."

"Just lean on me; I'll take you outside."

He helped his friend out of the Cathedral; with some difficulty they made their way to the waiting carriages. They found one, and Peiresc leaned back in it, fingering his sore ankle. Pieter commiserated with him, but all the time his mind was elsewhere. He had seen Princess Guémenée walking in the procession in an apple-green dress studded with precious stones, holding up her lovely red head with proud self-assurance.

Peiresc's injuries were fortunately light; after two days he recovered. He had two friends, the Dupuy brothers, whom he introduced to Pieter, and now they roamed about Paris together. Later Barberini, the Pope's nephew, arrived in the French capital to discuss the fate of the Valtellina with Richelieu. His secretary, Cavaliere Pozzo di Cassiano, was a close friend of the Peiresc brothers, and he joined the sight-seeing band. Pieter took good care during their conversations, to find out everything he could about the policy of the Holy See regarding the Valtellina.

He had frequent meetings with the Princess, but was careful not to betray his feelings. That stubborn passivity was his only defense in his wavering loyalty to Bella.

One evening, as he was walking in the palace garden before going to bed, he observed a woman's figure at the turn of a path. When she saw him, she laughed softly.

"Princess . . . what a coincidence. . . ."

"A pleasant one. I seem to have lost my maid. Sit down on this bench and wait for her with me. I have been hard at work, for the Queen Mother moved to Fontainebleau today. After my work I decided to take a walk, then that silly girl suddenly disappeared. I hope she will have the sense to turn up."

Pieter was silent in the flower-scented darkness.

"Tell me, Rubens, are you afraid of me?"

"No, Madame. I am afraid of myself."

"Why? What do you fear?"

Pieter was filled with sudden rage. He took her into his arms, so roughly that she cried out. But her cries soon ceased. He kissed her almost in anger, as if taking revenge for his torturing desire. She went limp in his arms and whispered:

"You see how silly you have been! You could have done this a long time ago. Wasn't it a pity to waste all that time?"

"Now I know that every minute is precious."

"But why were you so foolish? You must have seen that I liked you."

"I'll tell you, Madame. I love my wife."

"What of it?" she laughed. "I, too, love my husband. I really fancied you were afraid of my rank. You commoners not only call us goddesses but imagine that we live on ambrosia and nectar. No, my dear, we, too, are human. And, like goddesses, we can sometimes descend."

Pieter winced. His hand loosened around her shoulders.

"Pardon me, Madame, but do you consider this condescension?"

She turned to him in surprise. His arms fell.

"How strange you are! What else could I consider it? I'm not too proud to see prettiness in a serving wench, attraction in a lackey. But we cannot ignore that there is a difference. . . ."

"Lackey . . . serving wench . . . how amusing! . . ."

Steps crunched on the gravel. The Princess touched Pieter's arm, warning him to be silent; the maid could not see them in the darkness. But he called out:

"Are you looking for your mistress, girl? She's here."

When the maid came closer, he got up and politely said good night. He almost ran to his room. He sat down on the edge of his bed and buried his face in his hands. Lackey, serving wench. . . . He cursed himself with wild, spiteful glee; he had deserved it. Then he sighed. How had he become involved in such a situation—he who had guarded his pride so carefully all his life? He got up and went into the gallery, which was dimly illuminated by one or two chandeliers. But he knew every brush stroke by heart. And suddenly he remembered the words of Vorsterman: bombastic and self-important. Yes, these pictures were luxurious and dazzling, their technical skill peerless, their composition faultless; but they were bombastic and self-important. Why? Because he loved money. This is what the whim of his patroness had demanded, and he had served her obediently. But no one could be servile in his art and at the same time demand respect from the world as a man.

He looked at the huge paintings with hatred. He would have liked to cut them to pieces. But he shrugged and turned back to his room. Yes, Rubens, he told himself, serve the great of the world; but, when your work is finished; stay in your own circle.

Young Van Egmont, his apprentice, came in. Pieter told him:

"You must get up at four tomorrow, son. We must pack."

"Yes, master."

Next day he paid flying visits of farewell to all his friends and then took the first stagecoach. The soldier who inspected his passport at the Flanders frontier saluted him and said:

"Have you heard of the great victory, sir? Spinola's armies have entered Breda."

IV

The Archduchess was absent from Brussels: She had gone to Breda to inspect the fallen fortress. Pieter made his report to Peckius, who was especially interested in what he said about the Duke of Buckingham and Gerbier.

"My reports from London are not very encouraging," the Chancellor said. "Your connections may prove most useful. You'd better keep up your correspondence with your Paris friends."

"Two of my oldest friends have gone to the country, but Pierre Dupuy has promised to write every week."

"Excellent. You may report to Her Highness at Antwerp, where she is stopping on her way back from Breda. Are you going straight home?"

"Yes. I have only to see Doctor Chifflet about my wife."

The doctor had good news. Bella's attacks had ceased or at least become much more infrequent. Pieter set out on his journey to Antwerp much relieved—but he found Bella looking very ill. She had aged suddenly, although she was still young in years. Pieter questioned her about her ailment but she insisted that she was much better. The two boys were in excellent health; both of them had grown in the last four months. Their father examined them in their languages, Spanish, French, and German, and found that they had made good progress.

"All right, boys, as a reward I am going to paint you."

He told them to dress in their finest clothes. Albrecht wore his dark green suit slashed with white, a black hat with a broad brim turned up on one side, a fur-lined brown glove covered his right hand, while his left held a red-bound Latin grammar. Nicolaas was in his light-blue silk jacket with the yellow slits, his wide brown breeches and his yellow shoes. In his hand he was permitted to hold two of his favorite toys.

But Pieter's work at the double portrait was interrupted. The Archduchess, accompanied by the Marquis Spinola, arrived in Antwerp. Pieter received word that the visitors would call on him next morning. At the appointed hour the master of the house was standing at the gate with his

wife and two sons; Bella carried a big bouquet. The Archduchess arrived with Hapsburg punctuality. The children, who had expected a fairy queen dressed in gold and silver, were rather disappointed to see an elderly, fat lady in the habit of the Clarissa nuns descending from the court carriage. But her companion compensated them to a certain extent: Marquis Spinola was wearing a polished breastplate and a gorgeous helmet. The family curtsied deeply, according to court etiquette, in which Pieter had coached his sons the previous evening.

"Welcome, Your Highness. May I humbly present my wife and sons?"

The Archduchess smiled kindly, and as a special favor gave her hand to be kissed to all four members of the Rubens family.

"I had heard that you have been ailing, Doña Bella. Are you better now? Oh, what lovely flowers. Thank you. Spinola, will you take them?"

"I am better now, Your Highness. Thank you for Your Highness's kind interest."

Pieter watched his wife anxiously, but Bella's behavior was perfect, without a trace of shyness, respectful, calm, and natural. The Archduchess looked at the children.

"What handsome boys. You must be happy, Doña Bella; fate has denied such happiness to me. Let us go inside now."

"I thought Your Highness might care to inspect my collections first and then the studio."

Pieter walked on the left of the Archduchess. Marquis Spinola followed with Bella and the two boys. When they reached the private rooms, Nicolaas and Albrecht went into the nursery. The two guests were conducted through the rooms. Spinola was especially interested in the pictures, while the Archduchess spent a great deal of time over the antiques, and still more over the furniture, feeling the material of the tablecloth and the curtains, tapping the glass of the windows, a rarity in the house of a burgher. She was greatly interested in the mummy. In the drawing room, sweets and fruit were set out on the table. Isabella did not wait to be urged; she ate, drank three glasses of cider, and complained of the heat.

"I must praise you, Doña Bella," she said; "everything here is in excellent order. There are few women comparable with those of Flanders. They are good mothers, good wives, good providers, and pious, too."

Bella blushed for the first time. The Archduchess turned to Pieter.

"Well, Rubens, we have brought you a double surprise. You must paint

both of us. Unfortunately it isn't a simple matter. I have time for three sittings, but Spinola must leave Antwerp this afternoon. You must paint him in one sitting."

"I am deeply honored, Your Highness. As for the Marquis, it won't be to the portrait's advantage, but I will do my best."

They rose. Bella stayed behind when Pieter took his guests to the studio. He nodded to Snijders and told him softly that nobody was to return until noon, not even the models should remain behind. Two armchairs were placed on the dais for the Archduchess and Spinola; Pieter set to work, while the others talked to him. Spinola said that the siege of Breda had presented many difficulties, and that he had succeeded in taking it only after great efforts. At that moment Spanish soldiers were demolishing the entire fortress. When Pieter asked why Flanders did not retain it, Spinola explained that no territorial gains were desired, only an armistice.

"Yes," Isabella interposed, "our aim is peace, not conquest. I don't care how Della Cueva rants, nor what triumphs Olivarez is planning for the King. In my heart I have given up Holland. I desire only peace and prosperity for Flanders and Brabant. The question now is the new situation created by the death of Prince Maurice, and what weight Frederick Henry carries with the States General. What news have you from the Catholic?"

"I am glad to say, Your Highness, that he will still be most useful to us. His connections with Prince Frederick Henry are perhaps even better than with Maurice. But my contact with him is getting more and more complicated and dangerous. It is almost impossible to cross the frontier. We have agreed on a secret code for our correspondence: persons and cities are indicated by numbers. As soon as I have any important news, I shall report it at once."

He worked as he spoke, and the figure of the general began to emerge on the canvas.

"Letters will be difficult," Spinola remarked. "The Dutch are building new fortifications and have flooded part of the frontier. But tell us what you learned in Paris."

Pieter reported first the abortive attempt of Prince Zweibrücken-Neuburg to negotiate an armistice. The Archduchess approved heartily of his action in that matter. Then he spoke of the court intrigues, the reception to view his pictures, the events at the wedding celebrations. He gave an exact report of his conversations with the Duke of Buckingham

and Gerbier, using his notes, which he had spread out on the table. He explained that the Duke might have a decisive influence on English policy and that he was shiftless, immoral, and cared only for success. And indeed Peckius already suspected England of warlike design.

"Peckius is right," Spinola remarked, "I feel sure that the new English King has already made a pact in Paris with Richelieu and the Dutch. Every sign indicates that the war will spread. Well, we shall see who is the stronger: the Spanish-German Hapsburg power, the Papacy, and the Catholic world on the one side, or England, France, Holland, and the Protestant states on the other. In Valtellina it was Richelieu who triumphed. We triumphed at Breda. Until now our enemies have been unable to regain the Bohemian throne for Frederick. Nor will they ever succeed. The Emperor Ferdinand has disciplined the Czechs."

"And, while two halves of the Christian world are in strife," Pieter sighed, "the Turk is beginning slowly to swallow the whole of warring Europe."

"Don't worry about the Turk," Spinola said. "Hungary will take care of him. That is the least of our troubles. What about the picture? This breastplate is beginning to make me feel very hot."

"I have just finished. Your Excellency may inspect it."

Spinola and the Archduchess stepped up to the canvas.

"Amazing," the general said. "How much time have you spent on it?"

"Two and a half hours. It is just twelve o'clock."

"Wonderful. I wish my sieges took so little time. . . ."

At his request, Pieter showed him some of the work on which the studio was engaged. Spinola asked him to send his portrait to Brussels, whence it would be forwarded to Genoa.

"I shall come this afternoon," the Archduchess said. "Would four o'clock suit you, Rubens? I can only stay an hour."

"As Your Highness pleases."

At the stroke of four Isabella returned, still wearing her nun's habit. For an hour Pieter worked, and they talked politics. But the second and third sittings took place in one of the private rooms, for the Archduchess had noticed that she held up the other work of the studio. She said that she had had her fill of politics and wanted to talk to Bella, for whom she had a great liking.

So an easel was taken to a room where the light was good. Bella sat close to the Archduchess with some sewing in her lap.

"What are you working at, Doña Bella?"

"I am darning my sons' socks. I can hardly keep step with them. The boys are incredibly naughty. I dress them up in the morning, and by the afternoon they have torn big holes in their clothes."

"Are they going to school?"

"Both of them, Your Highness. They are good scholars, but they are always getting into fights."

"And their father such a great lover of peace! He ought to fight duels like other noblemen. Rubens, you need a device for your coat of arms. Have you chosen one?"

"I have, Your Highness. '*Omnibus omnia*. . . All for everybody.'"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Simply that I must not deny anyone anything I am able to give. Respect and loyalty to Your Highness. Help to my friends. Faith and work to my country. Piety and obedience to God. Alms to the poor. A kind word of consolation to the suffering. Honest and good work to my clients. All to all. When I die, I mustn't leave any unfulfilled obligation behind me. That is what I teach my sons, too."

"Doña Bella," the Archduchess said, "you must know that your husband was a noble man even before the King gave him his patent."

"He is the noblest man in the world, Your Highness. . . . Oh, forgive me, Pieter. I know you don't like me talking like that in your presence."

He finished the portrait in three sittings. The Archduchess told him to bring it to Brussels when he made his next report. Then she went, leaving considerable excitement behind her, for in the whole of Antwerp she had only spoken to one woman and had actually accepted sweetmeats and cider in her house. Pieter bought a beautiful ruby ring for Bella to show his appreciation of the calmness and dignity she had displayed during Isabella's visit. Then he returned to his work.

A few days later he suddenly cried out at the dinner table:

"That's it! My dear, send someone to the Fourments tonight: I want Helen to come here as early as possible tomorrow."

"Yes, Pieter. Why do you need her?"

"For a long time I have owed an important client a picture called The Education of Mary. I need a girl of about fourteen. I have been wonder-

ing for the last three days who could pose for me—and I didn't think of Helen! She would be perfect. How does she look now? I haven't seen her for some time."

"She's very pretty—perhaps even beautiful. A little spoiled, but that's no wonder; she is the youngest in the family."

Next morning about seven, Helen Fourment appeared with her old nurse. The youngest Fourment girl had just turned eleven. Bella had been guilty of an understatement; she was very beautiful. Her ash-blond hair was of the finest tint, her skin dazzling white, almost transparent, her big eyes dark blue, her finely shaped lips deep red. And she looked fourteen.

"Aunt Bella sent a message that you wanted to see me, Uncle Pieter."

"Yes, my dear, I want to paint you. Tell Nanny to sit down in the corner; you stand here. How you have grown, child; you are quite a woman now."

"Yes, I have told the servants to call me 'Miss.'"

"I see. Well, take this book in your left hand. Open it. Rest it on your wrist. So. Now raise your right hand toward your shoulder. Don't grasp it, just touch it lightly. Now bend your head forward a little and look at me. No, that isn't right. Act as if you had been reading the book, but are looking at me because I spoke to you. Excellent. . . ."

"What do you want to paint, Uncle Pieter?"

"The Holy Virgin, my dear. When she was quite young. Or rather when she began to grow up. Do you like the idea?"

"Very much," she said with flashing eyes. "But will people recognize me in the picture?"

"I hope so. I'll paint you a little older, as if you were fifteen. Do you mind?"

"Couldn't you make me look sixteen?"

"I'll try. Have you time to pose now?"

"Only a little—I must go on to the convent school."

"I see. Have you lessons in the afternoon? No? All right, go now and come back after lunch. Tell your mother that I am going to paint you. Do you remember when I painted you the first time? You were quite small."

"No, I don't remember."

After lunch the child returned with her mother. As Pieter began to

paint, he decided to include the mother, too. In spite of her eleven children she was still beautiful. Mevrouw Fourment raised no objection; she sat down a little shyly. Pieter explained the subject and the pose to her. She and her daughter followed his instructions obediently. While Pieter worked, they talked.

"Do you remember, Pieter, when I came here first with Helen? She was quite tiny—and how sweet she looked without her clothes!"

"Oh, Mother!" Helen said, blushing.

"Very well. There's no need for you to listen. That was the day when Daniel met Clara for the first time. And now they are happily married. How is Bella?"

"Thank you, much better."

"Thank God. The other day when she visited us she looked very poorly. But she said that the pains were not so severe. . . . I hope we don't disturb you with all this chatter. . . . Have you heard anything about Grotius? Did you see him in Paris?"

"No, but I hear that he lives a very secluded life. How are you and the family?"

They discussed the eleven children, and the mother had plenty to say about each. When the sitting was over, Mevrouw Fourment said that she would go and have her afternoon meal with Bella; De Vos's wife was also coming. That evening Pieter asked his sons:

"Did you play with Helen, boys?"

"It's impossible to play with her," Nicolaas said. "She always acts the grown-up lady. We quarreled too. If she is like that again, I'll slap her."

"Nicolaas!" said Pieter sternly. "You must never hit a woman."

"Well, she told me I was a baby. She didn't even want to play with Albrecht. And she's a baby herself. All right, I won't slap her if you forbid it, Father, but I won't look at her."

"There's something in what Nicolaas says," Bella said. "That chit of a girl said that she was only interested in grownups. She would only marry a man who owned a castle. And she's eleven! What are you laughing at?"

But Pieter did not tell her until after the children had gone to bed.

"I smiled, Bella, because I remembered that when little Helen was five you were jealous of her. And I think you still are. What will you say in seven years when she's eighteen?"

"That's simple," Bella laughed. "I'll be even more jealous."

Next day the nurse again brought the little girl. For a while she watched the busy life of the studio, then she asked:

"Tell me, Uncle Pieter, is it true that you know the French King?"

"Yes."

"And the Queen of France? Tell me, is she more beautiful than I am?"

"Neither more nor less beautiful," he answered, trying to keep a straight face. "Just different."

"And is it true that you are a nobleman now just like us?"

"Yes, but why do you ask all this?"

"Because I'd love to be a Queen, but I know that's impossible. So I'd like to marry at least a nobleman."

"Tell me, Helen, are you always thinking of marriage? Someone told me in town that you would marry only a man who had a castle."

"Someone? It was Nicolaas, that telltale. I don't like him. He is so childish."

"Do you like Albrecht, then?"

"Yes, but he isn't old enough for me."

"Why not? He is your own age."

"But he's a boy. A boy must be much older. I'll only marry someone who is much older than I am."

"There you go again! You never think of anything but marriage!"

"Certainly," Helen said and seemed surprised at his remark. "In five years I am going to marry—I must think of it in good time."

Pieter would have liked to jump on the dais and kiss the spoiled, vain little beauty. But he checked his impulse and continued his work. He finished the picture in a week. As he thanked Helen and her mother for helping him, the little girl became very sad.

"Is it all over? I have loved coming here. Mother, let me come again."

"Of course, Helen, you may come and play with the boys."

"But I don't want to play with the boys. I want to call on Uncle Pieter."

Pieter patted her head.

"You may come at any time your mother or nanny wants to bring you. And now give me a kiss."

"No, I won't!" She drew back, pouting.

"Why not? Don't you love me any more? You did, once."

"I still love you very much, but I'm no longer a baby. I cannot kiss men. Look at the picture, how grown-up I am."

"Oh yes," Pieter laughed. "I forgot. You are quite right. I must kiss your hand."

He kissed her hand ceremoniously. She was not a bit embarrassed, but offered him her hand, raising her eyebrows. He felt she ought to be slapped, but she was so sweet that he forgave her everything. When she walked away with her head high, pride and breeding in every inch of her, Pieter thought how Van Dyck would have loved to paint her.

Nowadays he often thought of his late pupil. Van Dyck wrote regularly from Italy; his last letter had come from Palermo and said that he was turning homeward, traveling through France. Pieter sent a few warm lines of recommendation to Peiresc. He began to prepare the ground for Anthony's return, so that he should not lack commissions when he arrived. About the same time the son of the late Jan Breughel also returned, after a long stay in Italy. He, too, was a painter, and Pieter acted as his guardian. He needed money to furnish his studio; he also planned to marry, having chosen the daughter of Goetkint, the painter. Pieter helped him to set up his studio and obtained some commissions for him. As he had received news from the Catholic, he went to Brussels. Alarming reports were current in the capital. England seemed about to justify the fears of Peckius and Spinola, for she had formed an open alliance with France and Holland. According to confidential reports, the British navy was preparing to attack Spain; at the same time the Dutch army was to annihilate Spinola's troops. Pieter returned to Antwerp in a gloomy mood. While he tried to kindle a small candle of peace, conflagration threatened the whole of Europe.

He received word that the Archduchess was expecting him at Dunkirk for an important discussion. Dunkirk was Spain's most important naval base against England, and the shipbuilding yards there were working day and night. Pieter found the Archduchess in one of the port buildings. She had moved with her whole Court to Dunkirk to hasten the shipbuilding operations.

"Thank you for coming, Rubens. The time has come to realize my old plan: I want you to enter into negotiations with the Prince of Zweibrücken-Neuburg. We have had some correspondence, but personal contact is necessary. Explain to him what difficulties he creates for me by negotiating with the Dutch through the French. I want him to leave the matter alone. But, if he can obtain possession of Jülich, that's quite a dif-

ferent matter. All this is bound up with a series of problems which I cannot explain in a letter; nor is it safe to do so."

For half an hour she explained what Pieter was to tell the Prince and what the Prince must be made to understand. Next day Pieter set out for Germany. Roads had been made impassable by the heavy rains; he had great difficulty in obtaining post horses. After much trouble he reached the miserable little village on the German frontier where he was to meet the Prince. Zweibrücken-Neuburg was a day late. In the single room of the tumble-down inn they argued from lunchtime till evening. Pieter won. By that time he was exhausted and hoarse, but the Prince had yielded on every point. By the time he returned to Dunkirk weariness had brought him near to collapse. Only the joy that he could report success kept him going.

"You are my best diplomat, Rubens," Isabella said. "I really don't know what I would do without you. And there are thousands of similar problems."

"Any news of the English, Your Highness?"

"They are preparing for a serious attack. According to all reports the Channel is teeming with British and Dutch men-of-war. We are working day and night. Twenty-one of my ships are fully equipped and can sail at any moment. But the Anglo-Dutch fleet is ready to attack them. Only God knows what will happen. I have given orders to sink all Dutch fishing vessels on sight. Don't worry, I have also given instructions to put the crews in safety first. It is rather disquieting, however, that no one knows the exact whereabouts of the British fleet at the moment."

"And what about the land fighting, Your Highness?"

"The news is not bad, though some of it disheartens me. Tilly is fighting against the King of Denmark, with changing luck. I am very angry with that man Wallenstein. No one can deny that he is a skillful general and most useful to the Emperor, but he does the most horrible things. Instead of pay he gives his soldiers free plunder; he burns every town or village through which he passes. The man may win battles for us, but he makes us hated everywhere and embitters the enemy so much that peace will become impossible. All Europe has gone mad! Rohan, the leader of the Huguenots, has captured the French fleet by a stratagem and taken La Rochelle. Now the troops of Louis XIII are besieging the port. Our King ordered the Duke of Feria to attack Savoy, but Feria has been repeatedly

beaten. Disorders are still frequent in the Valtellina. All this must lead to terrible misery. The soil is left untilled, commerce paralyzed. Catholics and Protestants are bound to starve together. We have been born in an unlucky age. Well, go home to your dear family and think of me, sitting here alone. Sometimes I look at the sea and cannot do anything but sigh."

Pieter kissed her hand with deep compassion and turned homeward. As he was still dissatisfied with Bella's health, he called on Doctor Chifflet in Brussels, whom he wanted to take with him to Antwerp.

"For God's sake, where have you been?" the doctor said. "I've been looking for you for more than a week. Hurry back to Antwerp, collect your family and bring them here. The people do not know yet, but I do: the plague has attacked Antwerp!"

Pieter rushed home. Having seen to transport for his father-in-law, Clara and her family, and Philips's children, he drove off with his wife and his sons. As they turned into the high road, Albrecht asked sleepily:

"Father, why are we going away?"

"There is serious illness in town. I don't want you to catch it."

There was a little pause, then Nicolaas asked:

"Where does the illness come from, Father?"

"God has sent it, son, as a punishment because men are wicked and hurt each other."

The connection between the plague and the war astonished the children; Albrecht was especially interested in the problem. During the daytime they were happy in their quarters in an annex of the archducal palace. They were going to a new school, acquiring new friends. In the evenings the family was again together. Albrecht besieged his father with questions.

"Father, why do wars start?"

"Because men are evil, my son. They are greedy and avaricious and want to rob each other."

"And is war a very great crime?"

"Very great. There is none greater than to take a man's life. For life is the supreme good; it is given by God, and only He can take it away."

Albrecht thought deeply. Then he said:

"Father, if a wicked man comes and wants to take away the house of a good man, must he yield?"

"Of course not. Never give up what is yours. Don't take the property of others, but hold on to your own."

"Yes, but what if the wicked man has a sword and a gun."

"Then you, too, can take up arms."

"And if he wants to kill me, must I kill him?"

"Yes."

"But you said just now that it was the great crime to take another's life. Yet when the bad man comes armed and tries to kill me to take away what's mine and I defend myself and kill him, God punishes me with the plague. Is that just?"

"God will not punish you if you act in self-defense. It is the same in war: a man who defends himself is not guilty. The guilty one is the attacker. But even that is not a complete explanation, for sometimes you can most advantageously defend yourself by attack. Let us put it this way: the guilty party is that which wishes war, and the good that which hates war but, when forced into it, defends himself."

"And have the Spaniards been forced into this war, Father?"

Pieter felt embarrassed. No one in the world could have embarrassed him, except these two boys with their strange questions.

"I don't know, Albrecht. Only the King of Spain can tell."

Yet he knew that the Spanish government wanted this war, under pressure from the magnates interested in the East Indies trade and the anti-Protestant clergy. But he could not discuss all this with his son. He could not tell him that the King of Spain wanted war, while his Flanders deputy, the Archduchess, was against it and, as far as possible, was restricting the Flanders army and navy to defensive action.

A few days after they had moved to Brussels, exciting news arrived: England had come into the open, her fleet had attacked Spain. The attack had been directed against the port and fortress of Cadiz, not, as had been expected, against Dunkirk. The first news was contradictory, but a few days later a clearer picture could be formed: England had landed six thousand men, but a sortie of the Cadiz garrison under the leadership of the seventy-year-old Spanish commander, Don Gyron, had thrown them back, and they had to fly to their boats. Six hundred dead remained on the foreshore, victims of the unsuccessful attack.

Brussels was overjoyed at this victory, but the future remained grim enough. The bullion ships of Spain from the Indies were in danger of being intercepted by the English. Don Mexia, whom the King of Spain had appointed commander-in-chief of both fleet and army, assured the Brussels Chancellery that no harm could come to the treasure ships; but no one believed him. Then the startling report arrived that the Duke of Buckingham had allied himself with the Moors of Algiers and through them with Turkey; Islam was planning a sweeping attack against Spain to restore the European power of the Moors. The Duke had arrived in The Hague and signed a treaty with the States General against Spain. The treaty was to last as long as the King of Spain threatened the independence of Holland, but in any case not less than fifteen years.

By this time Brussels was more interested in the plague, which had spread to the capital. Those who had fled from Antwerp had brought the infection with them. Pieter decided to move to some small village with his family. He hired three men to search for a suitable house and finally found one at Laeken.

He was unable to do any large-scale work there. His collaborators had

scattered; he lacked the innumerable weapons, dresses, armor, and other accessories which he used for his large canvasses; he also missed his huge library, which he consulted so often in the course of his work. But he could not live without painting and started on some smaller pieces. He painted a new portrait of Bella. She had aged years in a twelvemonth. But the brush was guided by affection, and the picture was kind. The December weather was very severe; sometimes blizzards made it impossible for them to leave the house. The daylight faded at four o'clock, so there was plenty of time for letter writing and reading. Pieter had bought a great many books in Brussels, among them a compilation of Leonardo's writings. He loved to delve into it and enjoy its wisdom. Bella would sit close beside him, busy with her sewing, while outside the two boys shouted happily, having a snowball fight. When he got tired of reading, Pieter put down the book and reflected on his own life. How peaceful and pleasant life would be without plague and war! His home was attractive and luxurious. He owned seven other houses in Antwerp, had considerable investments in the city, and possessed many other assets; so long as he was able to work, money would flow into his coffers. Bella was one of the richest women in Antwerp, and the two boys would never know want. And now he had to waste his time in an ill-furnished cottage without a studio, constantly worrying about his relatives, of whom he received no news. But the fire roared in the fireplace, and they ate well. Yes, life was still good.

In February, Brussels was at last declared free from the plague, and the Rubens family returned. Pieter had a long discussion with the Archduchess on the latest news. War had brought unparalleled misery to the German states. Towns had become depopulated; large cities were reduced to communities of fifteen or twenty families, whole streets had become deserted, the inhabitants had scattered far and wide in search of food. Starvation was everywhere. The Emperor decreed new taxes, but it was impossible to collect them even by the utmost cruelty. In some places those who could not pay were flogged. At Aschersleben several of these unfortunates died from the punishment. In the burned villages the planks and beams of destroyed buildings were used for firewood. At Halberstadt fuel was so scarce that thirty undamaged but empty houses were pulled down to provide fuel. These were the traces left by Wallenstein, Tilly,

Mansfeld, and the King of Denmark; the soldiery of both sides alike were torturing, plundering and ruining the burgher.

"Eight years it has been going on," Isabella sighed. "When will it end?"

"If the French and the English come to their senses," Pieter answered, "we, at least, may gain peace."

"They won't. It seems they are going to fight each other now."

"That was my impression, too, Your Highness."

Pieter had received precise information from Paris. Richelieu had managed temporarily to settle the Huguenot affair: for the moment, the revolution was suppressed. Rohan himself had been granted a pardon and even a ducal title to win him for the Court; but he had chosen instead to escape to England and continue his fight from there against King Louis. Though there had been attempts to open the Valtellina question, Richelieu had foiled the attempt, and the Hapsburgs had had to resign themselves to losing the corridor between Milan and the Tyrol. Buckingham had suddenly realized that the Franco-Spanish and the Franco-German tension on which he had counted in his plans had suddenly vanished. In his rage he quarreled with Richelieu, and this once more tipped the scales in favor of the Catholic party. But still the war went on, the English fleet was on the move, the Moors threatened from Algiers, the Dutch were besieging the frontier fortresses of Flanders. And Richelieu was just as untrustworthy as ever.

By the end of February it was safe to return to Antwerp. After a flying visit to Dunkirk, where he saw Spinola, Pieter helped Bella to pack the belongings they had brought to Brussels. He left her to finish the work while he wrote his usual weekly letter in Italian to the younger Peiresc.

In spite of all the clemency with which Her Highness and Marquis Spinola have treated prisoners of war, the Dutch have seized sixty of our Flemish subjects who served on merchant ships under the Spanish flag, bound them back to back, and thrown them into the sea. I have myself seen these corpses at Dunkirk. I thought that the captains of Spanish ships would receive orders to treat a similar number of Dutch sailors in a like manner, but no such instructions have been issued. You can see how much patience and self-control our side is showing. It is said that the King has appointed Marquis Spinola commander-in-chief of the fleet, but I have not heard him using the title, although he fills the post in practice. One of our ships has been destroyed in the port of Mardick through the treachery of two

Dutchmen whom the Archduchess had pardoned and taken into Spanish service. To show their gratitude, they set fire to the powder magazine and escaped from the ship. Fifty men were blown to pieces, only the captain and seven or eight sailors escaping by being thrown into the sea. Something else, less tragic, indeed almost amusing, has also happened. A Dutch deserter turned up in Dunkirk with the story that he had been ill treated and wished to have his revenge. He said that a good catch could be made on a certain point of Zeeland. He was believed and entrusted with a small armed vessel and a number of sailors and soldiers. They set out for Zeeland. On their way they met a larger vessel bearing the flag of the Prince of Orange. It made toward them. The Dutchman called to the crew on deck and told them to be prepared to fight; but, on finding that the other ship was from Rotterdam, he asked them to board his own boat; it would be worth their while. They complied with his invitation, but it was discovered that the ship had adopted the Dutch flag as a stratagem, being in fact a Spanish man-of-war from Dunkirk. The traitor was overwhelmed with ridicule and brought back to Dunkirk with his accomplice, the helmsman. Another interesting incident happened recently of which you can hardly have heard. The governor of Isendyck, an important district of Flanders now under Dutch rule, was considered to be a brave and clever man. He came in person to Gravelingen, disguised as a merchant, to spy out the land, but he was recognized and arrested. He was later set free, although the Council of War wished to hold him for ransom. Everybody considers his action incredibly daring. I hear that we are building even more ships, and an attempt is being made to persuade the King of Spain to keep a large fleet at Dunkirk, the present small fleet having achieved such notable results; recently a Turkish ship was captured and brought into port. Here we fear a serious break between Spain and France which would lead to a general conflagration. It would be better if the young men governing the world today were to maintain friendly relations instead of disturbing the whole Christian world with their whims. One must believe that it is the Will of God, all this war and suffering. I must close now, wishing you the best of health and prosperity and commending myself to your Grace.

Your humble and obedient servant,

Pietro Paolo Rubens.

One of the first persons whom Pieter met on his return to Antwerp was Van Dyck. He had returned in December and had not left his house during the plague. Now that he heard of his master's return, he hastened to call. He had become a tanned, self-possessed young man of twenty-seven.

At Pieter's request he related the story of his years abroad. He had stopped first at Genoa for a few weeks with the De Wael brothers, Flemish merchants who were friends of his father. He had found his master's letters of introduction most useful; for Pieter was still remembered with affection in Italy. Then he had taken a boat for Civita Vecchia and Rome. As he longed to see Venice, he had spent little time there. On his way there he had stopped at the Court of Florence and painted the portrait of Lorenzo Medici, the uncle of the Grand Duke, who had rewarded him with princely gifts. In Venice he had yielded to the enchantment of Titian. Unfortunately his money had run out, and he was unable to get any from home. He had returned to Genoa where he obtained through the prestige of his master some commissions for portraits. He had also visited Mantua, painted the Duke, and lived in the very same room Pieter had occupied. Then he had gone once more to Rome and there had painted a portrait which made him famous in Italy: that of Cardinal Bentivoglio. This success had opened the aristocratic palaces to him.

Master and pupil had a long, happy conversation; most of the characters in Van Dyck's tale were familiar to Pieter. At last the younger man said:

"Last autumn I suddenly felt that I had had enough. An unconquerable nostalgia seized me; I was unable to sleep at night, I tramped the streets aimlessly. I asked myself why I was going through all this torture—and so I came home. I wanted to come by sea, but on account of the war there were no boats from Genoa to Marseilles. With your kind letter of introduction, I stopped at Peiresc's house in Aix-en-Provence. I am really grateful for that introduction. Peiresc is an excellent man. We became very close friends."

"Yes, he wrote to me. He grew very fond of you, too."

"He gave me numerous letters of introduction to his Paris friends so that my time there was spent most agreeably. I didn't stop at Brussels, so I missed you—it was only when I arrived that I heard that you had gone. But now at last you are here and we can enjoy each other's company."

"Well, I am glad you are here, Anthony. Are you staying at home? I should advise you to settle in Antwerp. I hear news of misery everywhere, but we are quite all right here, apart from the dearness of everything."

"Yes, that is my intention. I find that I need not fear any lack of commissions. But even if they were scarce, I would paint for my own pleas-

ure. I promised my poor father on his deathbed to paint something for the Dominican nuns who nursed him. I intend to pay that debt now; in fact, the picture is almost finished. It is a Crucifixion, with St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Sienna at the foot of the Cross. I shall be very glad if you will come and see it. And there is also a sketch I want you to see. Will you dine with me—of course Mevrouw Bella must come too. Or rather, forgive, Doña Bella. My heartiest congratulations on your patent of nobility. Well, will you come tomorrow?"

"Gladly; I am sure Bella will be delighted. But listen: it would be advisable for you to pay a visit to Brussels. There is nothing more useful to a new studio than court patronage. I shall write to Her Highness this very day. Now come upstairs and have a look at the children."

Bella was very glad to see young Van Dyck. And, as they greeted each other, Pieter saw a strange look on Anthony's face. Although he had perfect manners, he was unable to conceal his surprise. Van Dyck's surprise was there only a moment, but that was sufficient for Pieter. His wife was looking so ill, so worn out, that Van Dyck was horrified. He saw her every day and could not judge the change for himself. Something had to be done. After all, Bella was still young. But she must be suffering. When they were alone that night, he asked:

"Tell me, Bella, what about your pains? Have they quite gone?"

He watched her closely. She winced, but replied calmly:

"Thank you, they haven't quite gone, but they are less frequent."

"Are you speaking the truth, Bella?"

"Of course, my dear. Why should I lie?"

"Very well. But please tell me if they come again. You must see the doctor."

"As you like, my darling. But there's no reason for anxiety, there's nothing really the matter with me."

Pieter did not insist, but decided to watch her. He wrote to Chifflet, asking him to visit them if he came to Antwerp. He received no answer and discovered later that Chifflet had been sent by the Archduchess to Spain to treat the ailing Philip IV. So Pieter sent for an Antwerp doctor, who examined Bella but had nothing new to say. Pieter became impatient and called in a third physician. But his diagnosis was equally noncommittal and unsatisfactory. Bella endured patiently all the medical exami-

nations and followed the prescribed cure. Pieter had to resign himself to the impotency of medical science.

The work of the studio continued at great speed. Pieter had a commission which had been delayed for years by various obstacles: he was to paint the Assumption of Mary for the Cathedral of Antwerp. He started upon it. The sketches had been ready for a long time; he had only to place the big canvas in position in the Cathedral and begin work.

He was supervising the erection of the scaffolding when a soldier from the Citadel asked for him.

"The Captain sent me, *señor*," the Spanish soldier said. "We have arrested a man on the Dutch frontier, and he keeps on asking for you. The Captain would like to see you, if you can spare the time."

"I shall come at once."

He recognized the prisoner immediately, although he had only seen him once for a few minutes at The Hague.

"Wouwer, it's you?"

"God bless you, Rubens, for coming. And how lucky that you recognize me! I beg you to get me out of this if you can."

"But what has happened?"

"A kinsman of mine died in Antwerp, and I had to come here to wind up his estate. In my absent-minded way I forgot that I needed a passport. I had no trouble on the Dutch side; they knew me and let me pass. But, as soon as I set foot in Flanders, Spanish soldiers demanded my passport; and, when I was unable to produce it, they arrested me, put me on a cart loaded with rogues and criminals, and brought me to Antwerp. My traveling companions stole my money and my papers. I have been begging and praying them for the last two days to let me prove my identity, but they just laugh at me. I grant that I'm at fault, but it's a hard punishment for my absent-mindedness to be kept in prison and refused a chance to clear myself."

"*Señor*," Pieter said to the Commandant, "this gentleman is Wouwer, one of the greatest painters in Holland. I shall straighten things out personally with Her Highness. Will you permit me in the meantime to accept responsibility for him? Will you release him on this understanding?"

The Commandant scratched his head.

"I'd do anything for you, *señor*, but that is against my orders. Perhaps

I might place him under arrest at your house. He must leave the house only to report here once a day."

"Thank you. You'll get instructions from Brussels very soon. Come along, Wouwer. Have you any luggage?"

"I have lost everything—I have only the clothes I'm wearing, and this shirt is so filthy that I'm ashamed to wear it."

"Don't worry; I'll see to everything."

He took the Dutch painter home, gave him a bath, and supplied him with clothes from his own wardrobe. When Wouwer left the bathroom fresh and clean, Pieter conducted him to Bella, introduced him, and then took him to the room which served as a picture gallery. Wouwer was amazed to see not less than seventeen of his own paintings there.

"I'm a great admirer of your talent," Pieter answered Wouwer's surprised question. "I bought them one by one; some of them I got in exchange for paintings of my own. You're in good company. Look at my other pictures; make yourself at home."

He put a guest room at Wouwer's disposal and gave him a sum of money to replace his luggage. Next day he sent him in a carriage to report at the Citadel and kept him in his house until his business was settled.

After the Court had given him permission to stay in Antwerp, Wouwer often went to the cathedral to watch Pieter at work. They had many talks about painting and politics; both agreed on the lunacy of war.

When the first sketch of the picture was finished, Pieter took Bella to the Cathedral. She was to serve as his model for one of the saints. But she was able to sit only once. Next day she complained of feeling unwell and stayed in bed. Pieter now worked the whole day long in the Cathedral; he asked visitors to see him there, and his letters were brought to him there. At noon he hastily ate a snack, scarcely interrupting his work, and returned home at dusk. He ordered the servants to set the table at Bella's bedside. The children remained with them until their bedtime. Then Pieter told his wife the news of the day. He spoke of the bloody battle between Wallenstein and Mansfeld at the bridgehead of Dessau. Wallenstein had won a great victory; Mansfeld had fled to Hungary, where he apparently hoped to receive reinforcements from Gabriel Bethlen. The news from Paris was that the Queen Mother and Richelieu had quarreled. The Cardinal had openly declared his intention

of making the power of Louis XIII absolute and supreme. The Queen Mother had fallen ill in her terrible disappointment. Then she had furiously begun to organize a party against Richelieu and had allied herself with the young Queen and Prince Gaston against the King. But Richelieu had spies everywhere and was said to have unmasked a plot against his life. He was preparing to punish mercilessly everyone involved. He was the master of France and had dark and deep designs against Spain. Bella listened patiently, although politics interested her little. She watched her husband with adoring attention. She had asked her parents and relatives to visit her only during the day, for she wanted to be alone with Pieter in the evening.

In the mornings they did not meet as Pieter still rose at four every day, went riding, attended Mass, and then started work. Then one morning before he left, Bella called him in a feeble voice. She was awake.

"Pieter, stay with me."

"My dear, I must go to my work."

"Don't work today. I'm very ill. Stay with me. Don't leave me until I die. It won't be long now."

He stared at her, shaken, with a white face. She took his hand, pressed it to her cheek, and began to cry.

"I deceived you, Pieter. The pains didn't stop—they grew worse and worse. I obeyed the doctors, I did everything; but it was no use. I didn't want to bother you. But now I must tell you, for I feel my end is near. Stay with me. And keep the boys home from school, let them be with me today."

Pieter rang the bell, but the servants were still asleep. He opened the window and called down to the groom who was waiting with his horse.

"Get into the saddle, quick, and ride for the doctor. Wake him if he is asleep. But don't tell anyone."

He closed the window and returned to the bedside.

"Bella, we know each other. Don't let us lie to each other. You have been very wrong in misleading me for so long. If you say that you are very ill, I know you must be. I want to say only one thing: you must have the will to recover. You must wish and pray for life with all your strength."

"Oh, I want to," she said, crying. "For the children's sake, for yours.

My life has been so beautiful, and even now . . . there's the pain again. I can't talk. If I bite my lips, I can bear it better."

Pieter sat in silence, shattered, waiting. A little later Bella said in a trembling voice:

"How often I have spent hours awake at your side while you were sleeping soundly. I bit my lips and listened to your breathing."

"Why didn't you waken me? I'm really angry with you."

"My dear, what could you have done? And you were so gentle and kind as it was. You would have sent for a doctor, and he would have said the same thing as the others. At least you had your sleep, you could go on working without worrying over my troubles. It was better so. Oh, it's coming back again . . . hold my hand. . . ."

At last the doctor came. He examined her, asked questions. Then he said, hesitatingly:

"We might try gold instead of silver. . . ."

"Why are you waiting? If you need a pound of gold, you shall have it. Prepare the draught yourself. But hurry."

When the children got up, their father told them that they were to stay at home, as their mother was ill; they must sit near her, quietly, and well-behaved. After they had dressed, they had a hearty breakfast at Bella's bedside. They spent the whole day there, except for an hour or so in the afternoon when Pieter sent them out for a walk. Pieter himself hurried down to the studio, gave instructions regarding the day's work, and returned to his wife. Several visitors arrived during the day, but they were told not to stay for long. The doctor appeared with his concoction of gold. It was a bitter, strange liquid, unappetizing looking. Bella drank it dutifully. When Ophoven called, Pieter asked him to arrange for masses in all the churches of Antwerp, to pray for Bella's recovery. Late that night Pieter said softly:

"Bella, don't pretend. I know you aren't asleep."

"Give me your hand. Perhaps we can go to sleep together. I have no pain now."

Next day Pieter sent for another doctor, and the day after for two more. They copiously bled the patient. One doctor recommended certain miraculous black pills, the other an Egyptian tea. Bella took whatever they gave her, but her condition became visibly worse and worse each

hour. Her parents were sitting in the next room; the children were sent away. Suddenly Pieter seized one of the doctors and shouted at him:

"Save her, man! Do something, anything, but save her! I'll make all four of you rich!"

The doctor grew pale but did not answer. Pieter released him and sank weakly into a chair.

"Forgive me," he said, "I am beginning to lose my wits."

On the last night Bella whispered:

"Pieter. . . . I won't be able to talk for long. . . . I am afraid I won't be able to tell you . . . take my hand. . . . I want to thank you for my life, the children . . . for the happiness you have given me . . . for every moment I've spent with you . . . whatever comes, never forget me . . . look in my eyes and never forget this moment . . . do you promise? Kiss me now. . . ."

Pieter kissed her. Her voice was a mere breath:

"My darling . . . my love. . . ."

Next morning Ophoven administered the last sacrament. She asked to see the children. They knelt at the bedside, crying. She stroked their hair, but could not speak. She lay like that for hours, breathing gently. Then her heart stopped.

The innumerable visits of condolence were a torture for Pieter. Yet the funeral had to be worthy of the Rubens name and the Rubens fortune. There were two funeral banquets with orations. Pieter gave a sum of money to the Carmelites to pay for yearly requiems. All this filled his dulled mind with a heavy, confused pain; and, when it was over, he felt that he would not have been able to endure it any longer.

For three days he stayed in his rooms, without talking to anyone, sitting and staring into nothingness. Then he decided that work might help him to forget. He resumed work on the altarpiece at the Cathedral, and tried to finish his sketch of Bella's face. At every stroke of the brush he had to bite his lips. For days he worked, dazed, as if he were living in a thick cloud. He went through his correspondence and answered the letters of condolence. The first was from Pierre Dupuy. He sat down and wrote:

My dear, honored friend, you are right when you admonish me to submit to unavoidable Fate, which has no regard for our desires and longings, and when you say that the Supreme Will has no need

to render an account of its workings. We can only obey and serve; there is no choice except to make that service as honorable and willing as possible, submitting to it voluntarily. But for the time being I find that very difficult, almost impossible. In your wisdom you mention Time as the great healer and I also believe that what our minds cannot accomplish, Time can. I do not wish to attain a stoical indifference, nor do I believe that the emotions which fill my heart now are unbecoming for a man. I have lost a companion whom it was impossible not to love, for she lacked every single fault of the weaker sex. She was gentleness and kindness personified; everybody loved her in life, everybody grieved for her in death. How hard it will be for me not to sorrow every moment for a being whom I shall revere and love until the hour of my death! I think it would be best for me to travel, for that would remove me from objects which again and again revive my great bereavement. . . .

He was unable to continue. He collapsed on the table, crying. It was the first time he had cried since his mother's death.

VI

Political affairs were becoming more and more complicated. Isolated wars assumed new significance and became integral parts of the European struggle. Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish King, was fighting the Danes, the Poles, and the Russians; in some places peasant rebellions had broken out, and tiny provinces had suddenly acquired an extraordinary importance. The innumerable elements of the general picture changed continually. The secret negotiations of the "Catholic" were languishing, for the power of the Orange party in The Hague had greatly decreased; that road seemed no longer a promising avenue to peace. But Pieter found a new way to prove his usefulness. The Archduchess thought that it might be possible to make use of the Duke of Buckingham to secure peace. Accordingly Pieter assiduously maintained his correspondence with Gerbier, for the time being writing only of general matters; but he was now awaiting Isabella's orders to make a detailed, concrete offer.

One afternoon his father-in-law rushed into the studio.

"We are in danger," he said, excitedly. "The Dutch have begun to attack us."

"What do you mean?"

"They are preparing a large fleet to sail up the Scheldt and take Antwerp. If this is true, they are certain to bombard the town. All Antwerp is talking about it. I wonder that you haven't heard. It would be better to send the children to the country."

"I don't think the matter can be so serious; if it was, I should have received warning from Brussels."

While they talked, Van Dyck entered. He was gloomy.

"I came to ask whether you know anything. Everybody says that the Dutch are planning to attack Hulst. Their fleet is gathering at the mouth of the Scheldt. Hulst is near enough to mean trouble for us."

"Hulst? My father-in-law has just been telling me that it was Antwerp."

"No, no, it is certain to be Hulst. I must say that I'm angry. What concern of mine is all this nonsense? Why don't they let me work? I'm

going home to paint. And if a cannon ball sets my house on fire, I . . . I . . . really don't know what I shall do."

"Nothing, Anthony. What can one do against a hurricane? Go home and work; I am going to do the same thing."

Pieter did not believe in the possibility of an attack on Antwerp. The Archduchess had an excellent intelligence service, and it was unthinkable that Brussels should be uninformed. He would certainly have been told of it. He went on calmly working. But next day the rumors were even stronger than before: the Dutch were coming. On the third morning he had news from Brussels: the Dutch were marshaling their ships at the mouth of the Scheldt, and Spinola had already taken steps to put the coast defenses in a state of preparedness.

So the war had come to the immediate vicinity of Antwerp, after sparing it for eight long years. Pieter was overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness. One man could do nothing against the whole world; he could only stay at his post and wait. The children must be kept indoors where surely they would come to no harm. And, if by one chance in a thousand the houses were set on fire, they would still have time to flee.

Next morning the August sun was shining brightly when Pieter rode along the banks of the Scheldt. There was nothing unusual to be seen, except some activity around the Citadel, where carts were driving up and leaving; apparently the garrison had received orders to prepare for a possible siege. As he cantered homeward, he met Snijders.

"Master," he shouted, "you can see the Dutch ships from the tower. They are sailing up the Scheldt."

Pieter turned his horse, rode to the Cathedral, and climbed the tower. But Snijders was wrong; nothing could be seen up the river. When Pieter stepped once more into the street, he saw a long column of marching soldiers, with now and then a heavy cannon. A priest stopped beside him.

"They are from Callo Guzmee's camp; they are on their way to the coast."

Pieter scanned the faces of the soldiers. What a strange profession, he thought, to be a soldier! The same uniform might hide a robber or a murderer, or a hero whom history would yet glorify. Which of these faces carried the mark of approaching death? He tried to imagine these strong, healthy men lying in a field, with blood flowing from their torn limbs. He shivered and set out for home.

As one caller followed another, he found it impossible to work. The fourth said he had been up in the Cathedral tower early in the afternoon and seen the Dutch ships with his own eyes. Pieter would not believe him at first, but then decided to have a look himself. And this time the rumor-mongers were right. Far in the distance he could see the ships. They were like water insects, drifting slowly nearer, bringing fire and bloodshed. What would happen to Antwerp? He felt a sudden pang as he thought of the new Jesuit church of which he had planned the façade.

Some soldiers stepped on to the platform and asked him to leave. They were carrying strange instruments and began to set them up.

"What are you doing?" Rubens asked.

"We have to signal to the army at night; these are the instruments. If you don't mind, *señor*, you'd better leave us as you're in our way."

Downstairs guards were preventing anyone from climbing the tower. Crowds milled in the streets. Strangers stopped to exchange views. Later in the evening gunfire was heard. But these sounds turned out to be signals from the Citadel, which were answered by every fortress. At night Pieter worked to the accompaniment of more gunfire. Light signals flickered in the Cathedral tower.

Next morning there were dense crowds around all the churches. Terrified people were praying for the deliverance of the city, and after Mass they seemed to loathe to leave. Pieter received hourly reports on the movements of the enemy fleet. At Lillo the Dutch reached the bend in the river and turned toward Saftingen. So it was Hulst and not Antwerp that they were going to attack. Forty thousand people heaved an immense sigh of relief, yet most of them knew that this meant only a postponement of danger. What if the enemy should occupy Hulst? The Dutch would thereby gain a foothold in Flanders, and Antwerp would live in constant terror. But a new report arrived: the Dutch had stopped well before Hulst. Their goal was apparently the fortress of Kieldrecht. It was said that the fort was very lightly manned, with only two companies of Walloons.

The Dutch landed their force without difficulty and attacked at once. But that part of the coast was defended by Captain Baglioni, who had set up six guns during the night, arranged his infantry in an advantageous position, and at the same time distributed over the plain the hastily armed peasants of the district. Then the wind, which had been blowing

steadily inland, suddenly fell. The current began to carry the ships slowly out to sea. Baglioni opened fire, and several of the attackers were killed. The Dutch were in danger of being stranded, thus becoming an easy prey for the Spanish guns and infantry. So they retired in great haste, raked without pause by Baglioni's gunfire. From the towers of Antwerp the little dots on the silver stream could be seen plainly receding. Two of the barges were lost: one had run aground, the other had been set afire by a cannon ball. The first was filled with ammunition; while, after the fire on the other had been put out, the Spanish found twenty-eight horses in it. By early afternoon the attack was over.

Excitement still ran high in Antwerp. It was said that the Dutch retreat was only temporary, that they would attack Kieldrecht during the night. People spent the whole night in the towers, but the Dutch fleet did not return. Antwerp was saved. And in the midst of the general jubilation the Mayor proclaimed great news: Tilly had gained a great victory over the army of King Christian of Denmark at Lutter in Brunswick. The Archduchess ordered Te Deums to be held and bonfires to be lit in every city in Flanders and Brabant.

Pieter attended the Te Deum with his two sons. While around him everybody was smiling happily, he sat gloomily in his pew. He was thinking of the battle of Lutter, of which he had received detailed news. The army of the Danish King had been encamped between hills and marshy land, in an excellent strategical position. But he had relinquished it in his eagerness to fight and taken up his position in the open plain. His army had been severely defeated. Blood, blood, blood. . . . Dead bodies and wounded screaming in agony. A Te Deum would be fitting only when universal peace was restored.

The longing to work for peace gave him no rest. He felt he had a genuine talent for diplomatic work. He had excellent connections. His fame gave an added weight to his presence everywhere. He was as well informed as any professional diplomat. Why was he not allowed to sit at the same table as those on whom war and peace depended, so that he could pester them until they signed a document declaring the end of all hostilities?

He went to Brussels and asked for an audience. He explained that he would like to get in touch with Gerbier. The Duke of Buckingham's influence on the King of England was considerable. If he could be per-

suaded to relieve the tension between England and Spain, Holland would lose one of the main pillars of her policy and thus weakened would probably accept reasonable terms. The Archduchess listened carefully, nodded, and said at last:

"Yes, it's an excellent idea, but the time is not yet ripe."

She had other things to complain of.

"I can hardly sleep, I worry so much, Rubens. I have been telling you a long time what huge sums this accursed war demands. Tilly, Spinola, and the others pester me for money every single day. Where am I to get it? I haven't any. When the Dutch sailed up the Scheldt, Olivarez sent me at the last moment one million six hundred thousand talers. It was gone in a moment. My debts are scandalous. If I get money, I have to repay it with interest. Fugger and the others charge thirty to forty per cent interest. I have already pawned all my income. The King is in the same position; he is glad if he can pay even the interest on his loans. All of us are clinging to one straw; the ships from Peru. Two Portuguese ships laden with bullion have sailed from Peru. They carry eight millions, Rubens, eight millions in pure gold. The King himself claims two millions; six millions belong to the Exchequer. At home the whole Court is anxiously waiting these ships, for the English may waylay them. A whole fleet convoys them. The two captains have received orders to blow them up if they seem in danger of being taken. The Pope has sent a special bull absolving them from mortal sin in committing suicide. I spend whole nights lying awake, thinking of these two ships. And they haven't arrived. What am I to do? I'll have to issue a decree reducing the rate of interest to four or five per cent. Many people will be ruined by that, I know. And for me it means only a brief respite."

"Your Highness, all this trouble is caused by the war. I have discovered that among other things war is always bad business. We must make peace, Your Highness, peace at any price."

"I have no greater desire."

"Couldn't I try to do something with that man Gerbier?"

"I've told you that the time is not yet ripe. I know the real intentions of the King; you don't. It is unusual for you to argue with me."

"I beg your pardon, Your Highness; I won't argue any more."

But he argued with himself, silently. He tried his luck with Spinola, only to receive the same answer: the time had not come. These two knew

something they had not told him. He returned listlessly, feeling foiled and thwarted, to Antwerp.

At home he had to attend a family feast: another of the Fourment girls had become engaged. This was Catarina, the fifth daughter, who had been courted for a long time by a well-to-do, handsome young man, a certain Pieter Hannaert. The engagement feast was an intimate family affair, but with the Fourments this meant fifty people. As he worked until dusk, Pieter arrived among the last guests. While he was greeting everybody, he looked up startled: Helen was standing in front of him—Helen, now a mature young woman. She was tall, fair, and lovelier than ever. Her figure was well developed, her dress clung to her full hips, and the fabric of her bodice was strained by her budding breasts.

"Oh, Helen, I hardly recognized you: you have become a young lady."

"Everybody says the same, Uncle Pieter. But you come so seldom to see me that you probably notice the change more than others. I hope you'll make up for that tonight and have a long talk with me all alone."

"I wouldn't dream of talking to anybody else."

Her manner had also changed; she talked like a girl ready for marriage. Pieter watched her with amazement and delight. She had been born in the same year as Albrecht, so must be twelve but anyone would have called her at least sixteen. She moved about, acting as the daughter of the house, but it was easy to see that she had little liking for the task. As a baby she had wanted to be a queen, and the desire did not seem ridiculous now. It was easy to imagine her at the head of a state procession or glancing from the window of a state carriage.

"I must congratulate you on Helen," Pieter remarked later to her mother. "It is amazing how she has grown."

"Yes, isn't she quite a grown-up girl? In a year or two she will be ready to marry."

"She is twelve, isn't she?"

"Yes, the same age as your eldest son. I remember, we expected our baby together, I and poor Bella. Mine was born two months earlier. But how are you, Pieter?"

"Thank you, every wound begins to heal sometime. But my grief has only been blunted: it is still there."

"And what are your plans? Do you intend to marry again?"

"I haven't even thought of such a thing."

"You ought to. Forgive me for meddling, but we both love your two boys. They are too young to grow up without a mother."

Pieter became a little impatient at this turn of the conversation.

"We are getting along quite well. And Bella was such a perfect mother that I cannot replace her by a stepmother. Where could I find her equal? But let's leave the subject, my grief is still fresh. The idea of a new marriage seems to me a sin against Bella's memory. Who is that young man who is courting your daughter Elisabeta?"

"Young Nicolaas Picquery. They seem very fond of each other. After Catarina's wedding next spring we may celebrate her engagement. Elisabeta is just seventeen."

"You have a fine, large family. How many of your daughters have married? Four, isn't it?"

"Yes. Clara married Pieter van Heck, Johanna, Balthasar de Groot, Susanna, Arnold Lunder, and Maria, Hendrik Moens. Catarina and Elisabeta are more or less betrothed. Helen is my last worry. God grant that I shall find some decent, honorable young man for her."

"She can have as many suitors as she cares, I'm sure. She will get a handsome dowry, no doubt, and her beauty is simply breathtaking. As a painter I ought to be a competent judge."

"Come here, Helen," her mother told the girl, who was just passing, "and be proud. Uncle Pieter has just remarked how pretty you are."

"You are spoiling her," Pieter smiled. "She shouldn't be told about her beauty."

• Her face was reproachful, but her eyes laughed.

"Do you grudge me even that pleasure, Uncle Pieter?"

The mother was called away, and they sat down together.

"Are you so pleased if someone praises your beauty?"

"Very. I could listen to praise all day."

"And aren't you afraid of being thought vain?"

"No. I love all that is beautiful. I love fine clothes, jewels, furniture. If I see a woman or a man who is attractive, I feel an instinctive liking for them. Must I love all beauty except my very own?"

"That's true," Pieter laughed. "I am sure you spend a lot of time before your mirror."

"Of course I do. I wouldn't dare to tell that to anybody else, but you are a great artist. I wish everybody were beautiful. Even old beggar

women should have soft white hair and handsome features. How nice it would be if everybody wore fine clothes, if every house were a lovely palace, if beautiful carriages thronged the streets, if the weather were fair the whole year round, with the sun shining every blessed day. . . .”

“And instead,” Pieter smiled sadly, “there are weary, ill-tempered people in the world, starvation in many places, and . . . war.”

“Why do you talk like that, Uncle Pieter? You shouldn’t think of such things, only of lovely landscapes, saints, and angels.”

“That would be grand, my child. But I have a great fault: I am far too serious.”

She looked at him and repeated the word mechanically:

“Serious. . . . Yes.”

But her face showed that she did not understand. The curious word seemed to have put an end to their conversation. A little later she went away, and Daniel and his wife came to talk to him. They discussed Bella’s death, Van Dyck, and Father Ophoven, who had become Bishop of Hertogenbosch. Once more he was advised to marry again. But he refused to discuss the subject. He did not welcome a general interest in his affairs. He tried to think of something else. His eyes searched for Helen. There was something rich, unconsciously dignified and luxurious in her. Amazing, Pieter told himself again and again, she is just twelve. She could be married off any day now. He wondered who would be the lucky man to win her in four or five years, when she was quite ripe for wedlock. It ought to be some young man who was about nineteen now; seven years were about the right difference in age. He must be rich, for this girl had been born for luxury, her beauty needed a gilded frame; a diamond could not be set in a base metal. He must be well born, too. Perhaps some courtier or aristocrat would take a fancy to her. The Fourment family had a patent of nobility and were well-to-do. Their kinship with Rubens had increased their prestige. I am going to marry her off, he told himself with sudden pleasure. He felt a sincere paternal affection for Helen. He would have liked to adopt her as a daughter to take the place of poor little Clara. She would grace his house, and he would invite a careful selection of young men to the house to court her, an officer of the guard or someone like Van Dyck. No, Van Dyck was twenty-seven, a difference of fifteen years was too much. Of course, there was much more than seven years between himself and Bella, but

his case was different from others; of a thousand couples only one could hope for such harmony as he and Bella had enjoyed. What a joy it would be to have Helen and her husband living in his house; he had rooms enough. . . . He roused himself from his half-serious reverie and watched the girl, who was lifting a basket of fruit, like Lavinia in the famous picture, the fabric of her dress tight over her breasts. Pieter smiled at his own childishness and took his leave.

A few days later he called on his parents-in-law. He took Brant aside and brought up the subject of his remarriage.

"I would like to ask you," he said, "not to speak about it for a long time. Bella was such a companion that it would be outrageous to think of a second wife a few months after her death. I don't know whether I am fit to marry again. Soon I shall be fifty. Whom could I marry? Not a young girl; I refuse to make myself ridiculous, and I don't want an old spinster. Can I marry a widow? Some faded woman who has grown-up children and will try to push mine into the background? No, no, the boys will grow up, the servants are excellent, and I am a man fond of my home. I won't marry."

"It is a matter entirely for your own judgment. We only thought of it because we still consider you our beloved son, and your future and that of your children cannot be indifferent to you."

"Thank you with all my heart, Father. But please, don't mention this question for a long time."

As Pieter walked home, he was suddenly assailed by a flood of long-slumbering memories. He thought of the Mantuan actress. Where was she now, and was she still alive? How charming she had been when she protested against posing naked before her lover. Pieter suddenly stopped. He realized something in a blinding flash. The actress had reminded him of Erica, his model in Rome, and now he knew of whom Helen had unconsciously reminded him. Yes, Helen resembled that cynical and indifferent beauty—not in her character but in her appearance. He still saw that perfect white body which he had used for the figure of the Genius in the picture he had painted for Duke Vincenzo. Helen's body must be the same.

And suddenly he was filled with a wild longing to paint Helen in the nude. While he continued his walk, he turned over this thought in his mind. He built up an imaginary picture of her perfectly proportioned

body, the dazzling color of her skin, the shining fairness of her thick hair. His fingers moved as if he were trying to sketch it with long, assured, swinging strokes. But that could never become reality; it was impossible that she would ever pose for him in the nude. Now her parents, later her husband, would forbid it. He ought to kidnap her, take her to some distant city, and paint, paint, paint. . . .

The boys were waiting for him at home.

"What did you do in the afternoon, children?" he asked. "Did you know your English lesson all right?"

"Oh, yes. Then we played."

"What game did you play?"

"What we would wish if the Fairy Queen were to come and grant each of us just one wish. I wished for wings like the birds, to fly above the houses whenever I liked. Nicolaas asked for a big man-of-war on the Scheldt to command himself."

Pieter approved of both wishes. Then he answered the question himself, though not aloud:

"I wish to be nineteen again. . . ."

He clapped his hand to his forehead and stared amazed into space. Suddenly he was afraid of himself.

VII

He could not resign himself to the postponement of his planned negotiations with the Duke of Buckingham. He felt that he could do much if he were only allowed. His self-discipline and his respect for the Archduchess fought against the desire for action, and the latter won. He wrote to Gerbier, explaining at length how, in his opinion, Anglo-Spanish relations could be made more friendly, and outlined the advantages which would accrue for England from such a turn of affairs. He asked Gerbier to suggest this to the Duke; if His Grace considered the ideas worth discussing, he, Pieter, was prepared to smooth the way to a peaceful agreement with the Brussels government. Pieter reasoned that if he received a favorable reply and they began to discuss a general plan, he might obtain some concrete results; if he reported to the Archduchess that the whole affair had been initiated by the English, she was certain to encourage him in carrying on. On the other hand, if the Duke of Buckingham showed no interest, no harm had been done.

But the Duke was much interested in the suggestion. A detailed correspondence began. Finally a point was reached at which a personal meeting seemed to be expedient. Gerbier wrote that in the second week of December he would arrive in France; Calais was the best place to meet without exciting curiosity.

Pieter found the date suitable, as for the time being he was busy with the settlement of Bella's estate. According to Flemish law he could not act as his sons' guardian; when a mother died the law prescribed that a separate person should represent the interests of the children, if necessary even against the father. In his case, of course, this was a mere formality. As guardians, Bella's two brothers were appointed. But all this demanded a great deal of legal formality and signing of documents. The public notaries, Hercke and Guyot, prepared the agreement, according to which "the whole estate is divided equally between Pieter Paul Rubens, a nobleman of His Spanish Majesty, and his two sons; none of the parties to the contract may retain any property except subject to this contract,

nor may the aforesaid Pieter Paul Rubens reserve for himself any special income of the estate; but he is to be permitted to retain all his clothes and personal linen, the objects serving his own person, his saddle horse with all its equipment, his arms and rings, except those which are in the glass case of which a special list has been made in the presence of the public notaries." After that the contract gave a list of the property to be divided; the house of the father, and seven other houses, cash, securities, assets, unpaid for but delivered pictures; but before the division into three equal parts could be made, the debts existing on the day of Bella's death had to be deducted. The contract was signed by the guardians and Pieter, while the public notaries exchanged glances: this was real wealth.

Pieter, having settled all his legal business, prepared for his journey to Calais. He announced at Court that he was leaving for a week or two to discuss some important commissions. At Calais a letter awaited him at the inn: Gerbier had been delayed at the last moment and would not arrive for another week. It was hardly worth while to return to Antwerp, so he spent the week in Calais. Once more a letter arrived with Gerbier's excuses: his arrival was once more postponed.

During this period of enforced idleness he read the books he had brought with him, sketched, and took a great deal of exercise. He did not fancy riding in the severe winter weather, but he walked for hours in the streets of the little town and on the seashore, loitering in the harbor, staring at the Channel, and reflecting on his own life. He had lost Bella barely six months ago, and the wound was still sore. He recalled his seventeen years of married life, and in all the scenes, conversations, workaday moments, the fidelity and kindness of his gentle, quiet wife shone like a beacon. Whenever he thought of the future, he could see only his present form of life: an active, busy existence by the side of his two studious, strapping boys.

But into the sober principles and solutions a maddening white body intruded. He could not rid himself of the thought of Helen. What was the sense of dreaming about that child? She was only twelve, an innocent girl; it would be an ugly thing to sully her image with thoughts of sensuality. Of course, it would be a great delight to paint her, but it was madness even to think of that. . . . His dream fled, but it returned again and again at once, temptation and denied bliss.

After several days a third letter arrived from Gerbier: his whole plan

had changed, he was to travel by a different route. He excused himself humbly, but he explained that he was hardly responsible, as his master gave him new instructions every day. He had to be in Paris as soon as possible. He could hardly hope that Pieter would go to so much extra trouble, but he would be happy to meet him in the French capital. At first Pieter was angry, but that soon passed. He decided that in spite of all he would go to Paris. It seemed foolish to give up his plan now when he had already wasted so much time over it. He had not procured a passport, but the last time his documents had been accepted at the frontier, and he hoped he would have no difficulty now.

The Peiresec brothers were out of Paris. Of his old companions he found only Pierre Dupuy. Dupuy greeted him with great joy and inquired into the reason for his visit.

"I am on a political mission," Pieter answered, "of which I must not speak."

Dupuy was a man of the world; he did not press him. They met frequently; usually at the royal library, of which Dupuy was virtually director. The nominal head of the library was a young man called De Thou, a pupil of Dupuy's who had inherited this post together with his father's fortune. He had no idea how to manage a library and was glad to have his teacher to deputize for him.

At last Gerbier arrived and lodged at the same inn as Pieter. The very first day they locked themselves in Pieter's room and had a long discussion. Documents and notes littered the table. The gist of the matter was that the Duke of Buckingham was greatly interested in the plan for an Anglo-Spanish understanding, but only as a detail of a much larger plan. The Duke wished to make a peace treaty for several years between four states: England, Spain, Holland, and Denmark. If he succeeded, England would be greatly strengthened against Richelieu. Spain, as the sworn enemy of the Cardinal, would be able to circumvent the growing French power in Flanders. The King of Denmark, being a Protestant, would provide an excellent balance to the religious composition of the alliance, while Holland would be assured of her frontiers bordering on Spanish territory. Of course there were innumerable minor details to be considered. Spain and Holland would have to define the spheres of their maritime rivalry. Spain would have to discover the attitude of Emperor Ferdinand toward the whole plan. England would settle the question of

religious freedom for Catholics on her own territory, with special regard to the fact that the Queen, the sister of Louis XIII, was herself a Catholic. The Valtellina question, the relations between Savoy and Spain—the wife of the ruler of Savoy was a sister of Louis XIII—would also have to be settled. There were at least fifteen similar problems which all demanded at least an hour's discussion.

Pieter felt in his element. Gerbier was the mouthpiece of the Duke of Buckingham, who himself represented the King of England. What he said now would be submitted to the English King. At last he had the chance to display his comprehensive and sound knowledge of foreign policy to advantage. Gerbier, too, was well-informed. The Duke of Buckingham had his agents at every European court—even at Brussels, as Gerbier divulged. Pieter would have liked to know who the agent was, but of course could not ask.

"It is an amusing situation," he remarked. "Here are two Flemish painters sitting in a Paris inn interfering with world politics."

"I have always said," Gerbier laughed, "that there is one man equal to every task in the world—a Flemish painter."

They made notes of all the points to be discussed, meeting every day and going over each one. In his spare time Pieter visited Dupuy and his other old acquaintances. He called on the Abbé de Maugis, who was rather put out by the visit; he still owed Pieter a large sum for the pictures. But Pieter did not prove an aggressive creditor, and the Abbé was reassured. He emphasized that times were very bad, the Queen Mother had many pressing claims upon her, and to disburse an extra twenty thousand talers was a very great responsibility. The new pictures, depicting the life of Henry IV, were in no hurry. He promised to notify Pieter when he was to be received by the Queen Mother.

"I won't send any sketches for these new pictures," Pieter said significantly.

"Just as you please, monsieur," the Abbé replied, somewhat relieved, as Pieter's remark seemed to dispose of the painful question of the first set of sketches.

A few more days passed in discussions with Gerbier; the word came that the Queen Mother was ready to receive him. She looked ill; she had aged considerably during the excitements of recent months. She seemed despondent.

"Welcome, Rubens," she said listlessly. "I am glad to see you. The Abbé has told me that you have already settled the terms for the pictures in the second gallery."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Well, then, you'd better set to work. The same number of pictures, and the same size."

"Does Your Majesty have any special wishes regarding the pictures?"

"No. Henry IV belongs already to history. You may select the subjects yourself. I only wish you to emphasize that during our reign France was far more glorious and prosperous than now, when an unscrupulous upstart priest is ruling it."

"I have heard with deep regret that Your Majesty has withdrawn your favor from His Eminence."

"Withdrawn my favor? I sent him packing. Let him rule alone, if he can. What amazes me is that the King has not found out the man yet. He will, in time. Give my heartiest greetings to your mistress, my beloved kinswoman. Tell her that I have remained faithful to Spain."

"I am most grateful for Your Majesty's gracious message."

The Queen Mother rose. She was angry because Richelieu had been mentioned, and she hated him so fiercely.

"Oh, yes. I mentioned to Princess Guémenée that you were to see me. She told me that you were a very pleasant man, but irresponsible. Have you done something foolish?"

"I hardly think so, Your Majesty. I am a humble artist and never forget the distance that separates me from a great lady."

"Well, I am sure she would be glad if you paid your respects to her."

"Perhaps she would find me a burden, Your Majesty. Besides, I am much engaged."

The Queen Mother nodded, and the audience was over, much sooner than the one during which they had discussed the pictures illustrating her own life. Pieter returned to the inn. As he climbed the wooden stairs, he suddenly felt a sharp, burning pain in his right knee, and cried out. He had to lean against the wall, else he would have fallen. He realized that for the last two days he had been feeling a dull ache in his leg; but he had paid no attention to it. However, this pain could not be ignored. He waited for a little, then limped on again, cursing, supporting himself against the wall. When he reached his room, he stretched himself out on

the bed and stared at the ceiling with indignant amazement. What could this be? How could such a thing happen to him, who had never needed to consult a doctor since Faber had attended him in Rome? He felt miserable and humiliated.

A little later Gerbier entered. Pieter forgot his pain and jumped to his feet. He fell back again with a cry.

"What's the matter, Rubens?"

"I haven't any idea. I am ashamed to receive you like this. I've never had any serious illness, but now my leg hurts me badly. Perhaps you'll forgive me if I stay in bed. We can talk just as well like that."

Gerbier sat down and produced his notes. He began to talk about the relations of Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire. He explained that after Tilly's bloody victory, the only help for the King of Denmark was an English alliance. King Christian's friend, Mansfeld, had fled to Gabriel Bethlen in Hungary and had died somewhere in Croatia.

"Forgive me," Pieter said suddenly. "I can't stand the pain any longer. It's so bad that I can't follow what you say. Please leave me now: we can continue the discussion tomorrow. I don't know what has happened to me—perhaps I got a chill in Calais. . . ."

"I am so sorry—it was on my account that you waited there. I'll fetch a doctor at once."

"No, I don't want a doctor. It will pass."

But Gerbier would not listen to him; an hour or so later a doctor arrived. He examined Pieter as he lay still fully dressed on the bed, groaning and cursing.

"Gout," he said briefly.

Pieter was outraged.

"What do you mean, gout? I have never had it before."

"Monsieur, illness usually comes after good health. I hope your health will be restored. I advise you to undress and get into bed. Your leg must be kept warm. We shall heat a brick, wrap it in linen, and strap it to your leg. I shall also prescribe an unguent to be rubbed on the aching part. It is an excellent preparation, made from the dung of a stag; usually it works. Also some tea to make you sweat. Take good care that the fire is kept on at night and don't leave your bed. You must be careful at your age."

"What age? How old do you think I am?"

"About thirty-eight or forty, monsieur."

"I'll soon be fifty. But why do you say 'at your age'? Am I an old man?"

"You feel irritable, monsieur, but that's on account of the pain. I'll come back tomorrow at the same time."

When the doctor left, Pieter was furious. Furious at the pain, furious with himself for being ill, and furious with this doctor who treated him like a helpless, decrepit old man. He wanted to jump to his feet, tense his muscles, and shout a challenge to the whole world. But he could not. His right leg hurt him horribly at the slightest movement.

Next day he felt a little better because of the treatment, but his leg was still sore. He had to remain in bed. He sent a letter to Dupuy telling him that he was ill and asking him to send a book about gout from the royal library. Dupuy brought it himself, but he could stay only for a short while. Pieter began to study the book and found many interesting facts in it about his mysterious illness. Those, the learned author said, who first felt the pangs of gout, generally laughed at the idea that they were suffering from it, and tried to explain away the pain by some other reason, or even denied that it existed. The book was so fascinating that it almost made him forget his pain. He tried to find in it an explanation of poor Bella's fatal malady. But it was a heavy tome, difficult to hold in bed; he had to give up reading. He fumed and suffered. He could not resign himself to his illness. And yet he had ample proof of it in his knee; sometimes the pain was so bad that he gnashed his teeth, dug his nails into his palm, and groaned like a bull. But on the third day he was able to continue his discussions with Gerbier. He stayed in bed for a week, but when Gerbier left his patience gave way. He got up with great difficulty and realized gloomily for the first time that he was growing old. He had arrived in Paris a healthy, strong, middle-aged man and was leaving it a groaning, limping, impatient valetudinarian.

When he reached Peronne, the pain began to abate; and, when he descended from the stagecoach at Brussels, he felt perfectly well. And although he had read in the medical book that people who suffered from gout always denied it at the first attack, he now did the same thing, arguing with himself, trying to prove to himself that it was not gout but some passing chill which would vanish without trace.

His first call was on the Archduchess. In the anteroom he met a lady-

in-waiting whom he had painted once and who was his good friend. She whispered to him:

"Be careful. For some reason Her Highness is very angry with you."

"Why?" Pieter asked in amazement.

"I don't know."

Isabella did not receive him with her usual warmth.

"Where have you been, Rubens?"

"At Calais, Your Majesty, and afterward in Paris."

"So. You haven't been to London then?"

"I don't understand your question, Your Highness. I have never been to London."

"Rubens, this is the first time you have not told me the truth. I am deeply grieved to be so greatly disappointed in you. Spinola, too, is grieved. You have been in London, negotiating with the Duke of Buckingham. In spite of the fact that I expressly ordered you not to negotiate with him, you have told him that I instructed you to do so."

"Your Highness, I can prove that I have only been to Calais and Paris. I can prove that I have not met the Duke. I can prove that his representative called on me in Paris and asked me to transmit a message to Your Highness. His Grace offers himself as a peacemaker. I can support all this with two letters from the Duke's representative which he wrote to me from London when I was in Calais. Had I been in London there would have been no need to do so. Here are the two letters."

He produced the letters and the Archduchess read them attentively. She was only half-convinced when she continued her interrogation:

"Well, if you have met, what have you achieved?"

Pieter told her in detail of the Duke's plan. Finally he produced a draft of it in Gerbier's handwriting. The Archduchess spent a long time over it. Then she glanced up.

"This is wonderful. You have brought back something really important, Rubens. You see, I was right. It was best to wait until they got bored with waiting and started something themselves. What did you reply to Gerbier?"

"I told him that I held no brief from Your Highness, but that I would report to you and let him know the answer."

"Forgive me, Rubens, for suspecting you. Everybody at Court said that

you had gone to London to see the Duke and had passed yourself off as my official representative. Someone told me this confidentially."

"May I ask who was my well-wisher?"

"You know that I never give anybody away. You may rest assured that he will receive his reward. You have splendidly justified yourself. I will clear you myself to Spinola; to tell the truth, I have complained to him about you."

"Your Highness, may I say respectfully that I have been done much less than justice. Where would I have been if the Duke's representative had not really approached me? It is only by accident that I have been able to clear myself. And, if I don't possess Your Highness's full confidence, I cannot undertake any further task. Your lack of trust in me grieves me to the heart."

"Rubens, I realize the justice of what you say. Forgive me. I recognize my fault and shall compensate you for it. Let us answer Gerbier at once. You may take down what I dictate. 'Her Highness has received the Duke's offer and replies that as for the difficulties between the King of Denmark and the Emperor, she offered her good offices some time ago in regard to these and shall do everything in her power to find a solution. But, as success is not assured and new difficulties have arisen regarding the Dutch colonies, it would be helpful if His Grace could inform us whether the King of England is willing to discuss a treaty with his own country solely. If Her Highness can have an answer to this question, she will inform His Most Catholic Majesty and submit the answer to His Grace. Therefore it would be advantageous if Monsieur Gerbier would clear up this point.' Sign it yourself."

"Your Highness, why don't we accept the plan of the four-power peace; why do we want to confine the discussion to England?"

"Because we want to be wooed. Don't worry, they'll woo us. The real difficulties are on our side. I don't know how I am to get round Olivarez. He hates the Duke of Buckingham. But perhaps this last great misfortune of ours will force him to see reason. Haven't you heard of it? The two Portuguese ships which were bringing the gold from Peru have vanished without a trace near the French coast. . . . It is horrible. Now we shall be deeper in debt than ever. I see nothing but bankruptcy before us. The last time the very clerks of the Court contributed money that Spinola might be able to pay the army. Just think of it! The King

of Spain borrowing from the clerks of the Court! I've reduced the rate of interest to five per cent, but that means only a little respite. Rubens, you don't know how much we need this peace. If the Dutch knew of it, we would be in a fine mess. Were you long in Paris? What did you hear there?"

"Almost three weeks, Your Highness. I heard lots of interesting news."

After his report, the Archduchess excused herself once more for her suspicions.

"I shall reward you yet," she repeated. "I shall be at your side when you need me."

Pieter felt happy but a little shamefaced when he left. After all, he *had* deceived the Archduchess. Still, perhaps his daring little stratagem might lead to a European peace. When he returned to Antwerp, he was in high spirits and felt completely well.

As happened almost every year, the Fourments were again about to celebrate a wedding. This time it was Catarina, and for days before the event Pieter was filled with the thought that he would see Helen again. For almost six months they had not met, and he was curious to discover what effect she would have on him now.

She was almost thirteen and was wearing her first "grown-up" dress. It was a light brown silk gown with a tight bodice. In the church people's eyes were fixed on her, not on her sister. Pieter was among them. After the ceremony came the banquet. There were many guests, among them Albrecht and Nicolaas, dressed in their best suits; everyone was charmed by their polished manners. Pieter could only give Helen a smile, so great was the crowd. As he sat and listened to the long speeches, Pieter felt a stranger. He would have preferred to talk to the girl alone in some quiet corner, to laugh with her, to drink in her beauty. But, although he made several attempts, he was unable to get near her and ended by feeling ashamed of his attempts.

In the next room he found Rockox and some other elderly gentlemen. He joined them. They received him with great warmth, but he answered their questions absent-mindedly. He was angry with himself for behaving like a raw young student; after all he had nothing to do with the girl, he merely found her attractive, liked to smile at her simplicity, and, secretly, dreamed of painting her in the nude. There was no sense in it all; if he did not see her for some time, she would no longer excite him.

He began to attend to Rockox. There was soon a lively debate going on. Suddenly he saw that his two sons were standing at his side.

"Father," Albrecht said, "it's five o'clock. You told me to warn you, as you wanted to go home then."

He got up and left at once, without saying good-by to his host and hostess—it would have been impossible to find them in the crowd.

A few weeks later the answer from England arrived. It was better than he had expected. The Duke himself wrote, in extremely warm terms. He said that he had spoken to the King, who agreed that the German Emperor and the King of Denmark should settle their problems separately, but he insisted that the peace plan should include England, Spain, and Holland. It was a moral impossibility for England to leave out the Dutch Netherlands, as they had been allies for so long.

Pieter hurried with the letter to Brussels. He expected the Archduchess to dictate an answer at once. But he was disappointed.

"We cannot reply immediately," Isabella said. "Negotiations are going on in Madrid of which I cannot speak now, and the terms of our answer depend on them. As soon as I receive news from Madrid, I shall let you know."

Pieter returned to Antwerp somewhat depressed. He knew the infinite slowness of the Spanish government. He feared that the news the Archduchess expected would take an interminably long time to arrive, thus forcing him to keep the Duke and Charles I waiting.

He met Helen on the day of his return. He had had some business at the Town Hall and was hurrying home. Sunlight meant money for the painter; he could not afford to waste it. He was hastening toward the Wapper when he met Helen face to face. She was with her nurse, and her face brightened when she saw him.

"Good morning, Uncle Pieter. Don't be in such a hurry; stop a little and talk to me."

"My easel is waiting for me, child."

"You are painting all the time and haven't a moment for me! Is that how you love me? You didn't even speak to me at Catarina's wedding. I searched for you everywhere when things were quieter, but you had vanished without even saying good-by. Was that nice?"

"Now I am here and you can tell me what you wanted to tell me then."

"It wasn't anything special. I just wanted to sit beside you and listen to you talking. These young people talk such nonsense; it's incredible. When some young man begins, I always sigh to myself and think: My God, how long do I have to listen to this? I have to, of course, for Mother is angry if I am not polite to them. But I always learn something from you. Are you never coming to see us?"

"I am very busy, my dear, and often out of town. As soon as I am free, I'll come and see you."

"That's just an empty promise. At least stay with me now for a little. Come with me, I want to shop."

She did not wait for an answer but went on. Pieter followed her hesitatingly; he was thinking of the canvas waiting for him. Yet he followed her. Helen was visibly proud of her famous kinsman, she glanced left and right to see whether any acquaintance had noticed them, her face flushed with her delight in her youth and the spring air. They turned into a draper's shop, where Helen spent a long time choosing and buying, talking all the time, trying to draw Pieter into the conversation. She waited to choose a ribbon for her straw hat. Pieter fidgeted nervously but found himself examining the merchandise on the counter. He did not like any of the ribbons, sent for new ones, and tried them against her hair in front of the mirror.

"Haven't I a wonderful kinsman?" Helen asked the shopkeeper. "Who in Antwerp could choose a finer ribbon?"

"Let's hurry now, Helen; this blue will do."

"Very well, but I must buy some braid. It's very important."

"So is my work."

"Surely not more important than my braid? If those pictures have waited so long, they can wait a little longer. Come on; help me."

Pieter weakened and stayed. Then he accompanied her home, simply because she would not let him go.

"Child, do you know how much of my time you have wasted?"

"It doesn't really matter, Uncle Pieter; what matters is that I have been with you and that the whole city saw me."

"Aren't you a trifle selfish, you little witch?"

She stared at him and asked in a tone of frank surprise:

"What could I be but selfish? I love joy. . . ."

She made him promise once more to call and then vanished with her

nurse in the doorway. Pieter cursed himself; he had wasted all the morning and would be late for lunch. He always demanded punctuality from his boys, and now he had set them a bad example. Also he had been weak-willed—an experience new to him. The girl was charming, but possessed a bottomless egoism, and was actually aware of it. This childish game must really stop. Such small examples showed that a whim which one did not combat in time might cause untold trouble and suffering. He told himself severely: You are fifty. Fifty years, half a century. You have a dignity and pride you must not forget. Pieter Paul Rubens, court painter, a nobleman of Spain, an elderly gentleman, giggling in a draper's shop with a fair-haired chit of a girl. . . . No more Helen, enough. He must stick to people of his own age. He must organize a life worthy of himself, sensibly, healthily. He must buy that country cottage now; and, if he had any time to spare, he must not spend it with little girls like an old rake, but take his boys to the country.

A man called Loemans had been trying to persuade him for a long time to buy his small country estate. Pieter had been to look at it once. It was in Eeckeren; it was a charming little house on an island in the middle of a small lake made accessible by an arched bridge. Though nothing out of the ordinary, the house would serve as an admirable summer residence. It was surrounded by old trees; larks soared above the wheat, frogs croaked in the evenings, and instead of the city noise there was an enchanting silence. He had not bought it because he had found it too expensive. Next Sunday he took the boys to Eeckeren and had another look at the house. He found a farmhand hanging about, invited him to share their meal, and questioned him closely. Then he asked the boys how they liked the place. They were enthusiastic. Albrecht decided to study the animals and plants, Nicolaas made up his mind to fish. The little estate had a very pretty name; it was called "Het Hoff van Urssel." Pieter decided to buy it and on Monday sent for Loemans. Two weeks later the contract was signed. He planned to spend a good deal of his time there with the boys and perhaps build a country mansion in place of the small cottage. He even considered the possibility of moving to the country completely some time in the distant future. He would give up the large-scale studio work, accept only commissions which were really to his liking, and paint for himself. But not yet. His fortune was not big enough—he wished his boys to be even richer. Why

should not both of them be millionaires? For quite a long time he would have to work hard; in the meantime his little "Hoff van Urssel" would do for Sundays. The fruit trees were beginning to blossom.

But the very next Sunday he had to give up his outing. He had been asked to go to Brussels. The Archduchess took a long time to come to the point, but she had important information.

"Listen, Rubens. I have very grave things to tell you. This time you will not suspect me of failing to take you completely into my confidence. The situation is extremely serious. Now you will have to collect all your wits. In this matter of peace we have to grapple not only with Richelieu, Buckingham, the States General, the King of Denmark, and the Emperor. We have a much mightier opponent: the King of Spain."

"Your Highness, the Spanish government has never wanted peace. We have had to work against our own masters in the past."

"That was all child's play compared with the new situation. We have made an alliance with France against England. Spain and France are going to attack the English. The cost of the war is to be borne jointly, the King of England is to be dethroned, the English foreign possessions divided. The maps are already prepared. Ireland is to belong to the Papal State. The Pope has been informed of the plan of attack."

"Your Highness, this is terrible," Pieter said, turning pale.

"It is. The treaty was signed on March the twentieth, by Olivarez and the French Ambassador. Now the King has instructed me not to reject the possibilities opened up by the Duke of Buckingham's plan, but to continue negotiations as slowly as possible and without coming to any definite agreement. His Majesty has written to me in his own hand, but the letter was no doubt inspired by Olivarez."

"May I ask a question, Your Highness? What is Olivarez's real intention? If he wants to attack England, what is the use of negotiations with the Duke of Buckingham?"

"His purpose may be twofold. Either he really wants war and hopes to surprise England completely by negotiating for a peace until the very last moment. Or he may think that with an ally like Richelieu one must always keep another door open. Our task is the same in both cases: to continue discussions with the Duke. I have the King's personal authorization for that."

"I cannot understand this, Your Highness. How can His Majesty part

with such a document? What would Richelieu say if he discovered that while we have signed an offensive treaty with him we are discussing peace behind his back?"

"Oh, don't worry about Olivarez. The authorization has been ante-dated, by more than a year. If Richelieu discovered it, the King could say: 'Yes, I gave such an authorization to my aunt early in 1626, but have not informed her of the March 1627 treaty. She continued negotiations, and I didn't want to spoil her innocent fun.'"

"I see. Olivarez has two irons in the fire."

"Yes. But we mustn't give up all hope of peace. Write to the Duke at once informing him that I have the authorization. Don't tell him that it has just arrived from Madrid; if necessary we must maintain that we received it a year ago. I hereby appoint you to conduct these negotiations in my name. You may meet Gerbier somewhere, though I would prefer that you spoke to the Duke himself. However, it would be too conspicuous if you were to go to London, so find some other place. Are you satisfied?"

"I am most happy, Your Highness."

Pieter glanced at the Archduchess, and his heart was filled with affection. During the past years their relationship had grown to one of intimate friendship, by their common desire to bring peace.

He risked a cautious question concerning who had denounced him regarding his secret negotiations with Gerbier, but Isabella remained silent. In Antwerp he had often pondered the question, going over the members of Isabella's Court and the Antwerp people who frequented Brussels; he could not think of anyone capable of such an action. And yet he was a good enough politician to know that any baseness was possible in personal intrigues. At last he told himself with resignation that he would never know. To safeguard his position, he wrote to Gerbier at length asking him to get the Duke of Buckingham to write to Isabella saying that he wished Rubens to be the negotiator, as he knew him well and trusted him.

Pieter was delighted to see that his position at Court was stronger than at any time before, and that the Infanta valued him more highly than ever. Nor could he complain of the respect shown to him by the Duke of Buckingham.

He was working in his studio when, unannounced, a strange priest entered and introduced himself:

"My name is Scaglia, I am an envoy extraordinary of the Duke of Savoy. I would like to speak to you confidentially, *signor*."

Pieter took him to his room, and the young, handsome, polite Abbé began:

"I have come from England, *signor*. I know that I can talk to you confidently, so I shall tell you the reason of my journey. My master, the Duke Charles Emmanuel, has a claim to Corsica. He wishes to gain the support of England and therefore sent me to London. I had a long discussion with the Duke of Buckingham; he honored me with his confidence and described his great peace plan, asking for my humble assistance. *Signor* Gerbier, with whom I became very friendly, is unable to leave England. I undertook to deputize for him. But His Grace enjoined me not to call on the Court, but to come to you. Here I am, and here is His Grace's letter of authorization."

Pieter found the Abbé a likable man, and the letter seemed to be in order, but for safety's sake he asked him a few questions—after all he might be a spy. The Abbé Scaglia answered all of them satisfactorily, with a smile.

"I respect your caution, *signor*, but you may be assured that I can be trusted. I would suggest that you take me to the Archduchess. In the meantime let us not talk of politics. May I ask you to show me your pictures and collections? I have heard much about them in London."

The Abbé proved to be a traveled and well-educated man. Next day Pieter took him to Brussels. The Archduchess was surprised that a new representative had arrived from London, but she also found the Duke's choice of a negotiator most fortunate. Spinola happened to be in Brussels, and he was called to the conference. The general line of the negotiations was settled, and the discussion of details was left to Pieter and the Abbé. These discussions took three days. Then Scaglia drew up concisely the Brussels standpoint and dispatched it to England. He planned to stay in Brussels until Buckingham's reply arrived.

Pieter took the opportunity to call on Van Dyck, who had now moved to Brussels. He was working on a large picture of the City Council of Brussels. Pieter inspected it with attention and embraced Anthony at the end.

"I am delighted," he said. "When you came to my studio, you were so much under my influence that some of your pictures might have been taken for mine. But now you have learned all I could teach you and yet your pictures are entirely your own."

"You make me happy, master. I feel that, too."

"I know from experience how great a thing it is to realize that we have discovered ourselves. I am sure that your fame will be enduring."

"Yes, I am a very good painter," Anthony nodded seriously.

Pieter laughed. There was something irresistible in Anthony's bragging. Whom did he resemble in this? And the smile faded from Pieter's face. Anthony was just like Helen when she spoke of her beauty. Pieter did not like to think of Helen, and nowadays that happened very seldom.

After spending some time at his work in Antwerp he was again called to Brussels. To his great surprise he no longer found Scaglia there; at the inn he was told that the Abbé had suddenly left.

"I have recapitulated all the points in a letter sent by express courier to the King," the Archduchess told him when Pieter inquired after the Abbé. "His Majesty had nothing to say regarding the gist of our discussions, but objected to Scaglia's person. He instructed me to send him away on some excuse as soon as possible."

"What objection could His Majesty have to Scaglia?"

"Who knows? Perhaps he has received bad reports of him. Perhaps Olivarez has special plans for Savoy. Perhaps the French found him too conspicuous. One might know, if one lived in that witches' kitchen in Madrid. The King also wrote about you, Rubens."

"About me?"

"Yes. You don't know yet that the Duke of Buckingham sent me a special letter asking me to retain you in these negotiations. This, too, I reported to His Majesty. Now I am going to show you copies of two letters. But let me first remind you of the talk we had in this very room when you returned from Paris. I told you then that I would compensate you for having doubted your integrity, and stand up for you if you were ever in a tight corner. Read the passage in the King's letter which I have marked."

Pieter obeyed. He read:

I am much surprised that Your Highness employed a painter in a matter of such importance. This might well endanger the credit

of our House; its authority must suffer from the fact that foreign ambassadors might be forced to discuss affairs of such weight with a man of lesser rank. Even if the country which made the offer has chosen freely the person of the intermediary, and even if it is not repugnant for England to have Rubens fill this role, for Us this choice is certainly regrettable.

Pieter grew pale; his hands trembled.

"You must realize," the Archduchess continued, "that after this I should have written to Buckingham asking him to choose some noble or prelate in your stead. Now you may read my answer. Here. . . ."

Pieter glanced through the draft of Isabella's letter:

I should like to call Your Majesty's attention to the fact that Gerbier, too, is a painter, and that the Duke of Buckingham insisted that he would treat with us only through Rubens. Nor is it important who conducts such negotiations, if progress is made; it is clear that the final stages will be entrusted to persons in a more official position. . . .

"So go on working; don't listen to anybody and count on me."

"Thank you, Your Highness."

While he walked toward Van Dyck's studio, Pieter still felt dazed. "A man of lesser rank," the King had written in his deep contempt for art. But why did the Archduchess show him these letters? She knew they were not likely to inspire in him a special enthusiasm for the King. There was only one explanation: Her Highness hated her royal nephew. The dynasties shone dazzlingly in the face of the world; but, if one looked at them closely, their members were human, very much so. . . .

VIII

He had to meet Gerbier, but the problem was where? Buckingham's secretary could not come to Brussels—the whole world and especially Richelieu would hear of his visit.

Finally, after long correspondence, they agreed that Gerbier should go to Holland and that Pieter should meet him there. He succeeded in getting a passport through Sir Dudley Carleton; after being in retirement for some time he was once more representing England at The Hague. They might meet under some safe pretext at Delft, which was a quiet enough place. Pieter was going to pretend that he was visiting his famous Dutch colleagues, while Gerbier found a splendid excuse in his master's rather carelessly taken decision to buy Pieter's collection of antiques. They would have perfectly legitimate business to transact.

On a July day Pieter set out for Utrecht by way of Breda. Utrecht was the center of the Dutch painters, the Antwerp of Holland. Here the school of the "Italianates" worked, the painters who had visited the land of Michelangelo and Raphael and who were trying to transplant to their homeland what they had learned in Italy. He took a room at an inn and wrote at once to Bloemaert that he would like to pay his respects next morning.

Next day he called on the famous painter. Bloemaert was a white-haired old man with stooping shoulders. He seemed embarrassed when he received the great Rubens, bowing and scraping while he led him inside and presented his three sons, Hendrik, Cornelis, and Adrian, who were all dressed in their best finery in honor of the famous visitor.

"All three of them are painters," the old man said proudly. "Except Cornelis, who prefers engraving."

"I cannot wish anything better for them," Pieter replied, "than that they should surpass their father."

While he looked at the pictures, the two men discussed Italy. The old painter loved to talk of his travels.

"What has brought us the honor of your visit to Holland, Mynheer?"

"Yourself and your colleagues, sir. I have heard so much of your fame that I wanted to become acquainted with you personally. I have been to The Hague, but that doesn't mean that I know Holland. I have taken a few weeks off to discover for myself a fine and noble country which unfortunate circumstances separate from us. But I don't want to talk of that; I never meddle in politics."

"You are right in keeping away from them, Mynheer; we do the same. . . ."

The visit lasted a long time. Old Bloemaert accompanied his guest to the gate and bowed deeply as they said good-by. Next day Pieter called on Tebruggen, Bloemaert's pupil. Tebruggen's studio was cluttered with armor, muskets, saddles—he usually painted historical pictures—but in spite of that it was as clean as a new pin. The artist was a sturdy man in his prime and liked to talk of foreign countries, having spent ten years in Rome. Pieter told him about the Romanists of Antwerp, the pleasant gatherings of the society spent in discussing Italy; the literature of the classic age, memories of Rome, Venice, Florence. Then they spoke of the position of the Dutch painters. Utrecht also had a St. Luke Guild but it had many difficulties to face.

"There's nothing more loathsome than war," the painter of battle pieces said.

"You express what I feel too, Mynheer. Our countries are at war; therefore we are enemies. But I feel nothing but respect and friendship for you."

"I feel greatly honored. For me, too, it's ridiculous to think of you as an enemy. But when will these troubled times pass?"

"I don't know. I am not versed in politics."

The third was Poelenburgh, another pupil of Bloemaert. Pieter entered his studio and asked:

"Do you remember me, Mynheer?"

"Of course I do; whenever I heard of the famous Rubens, I always felt a shrewd suspicion that it was the man I met at Elsheimer's in Rome. But I couldn't really hope that you would remember me."

"Well, my memory has never failed me yet. And I was very fond of our poor friend Adam; I remember his friends better than most of my other acquaintances in Rome. What an honest, warm-hearted man Elsheimer was!"

"Yes. I remember your great affection for each other. That German doctor was also one of your circle. I forgot his name."

"Faber. I hear that he is still hale and hearty. My brother has been dead a long time. But won't you show me your pictures?"

Poelenburgh preferred mythological subjects, but each subject was usually a pretext for creating a landscape. All his figures were placed against the background of the Campagna.

"Do you remember Honthorst, Mynheer? He is even younger than I am."

"Of course; I am going to call on him tomorrow. Is he doing well?"

"Well enough. He is the Master of our Guild. I mentioned him, because he was looking forward greatly to your visit."

Honthorst was still on the right side of forty; he, too, had started in Elsheimer's Roman studio. He had become the most successful of the Utrecht school; he was chiefly a portrait painter and charged high prices. His enjoyment of his rides was spoiled by his constant ill health.

"I have just had an idea, Mynheer," Pieter told him during their conversation, "I am going to travel all over your country. Wouldn't you like to accompany me? We could have plenty of enjoyable talk on the way, and you could explain to me the sights in the different cities."

"The thought makes my heart ache—I should be so happy to go. But I am still an invalid and would probably be forced to take to my bed on the second day of the journey. I know I am going to regret this lost opportunity all my life."

Pieter looked at the pictures and found in them the daring use of light and shadow which Elsheimer had loved so much and which had charmed Pieter in Caravaggio. There was a half-finished canvas of Diogenes on one of the easels.

"This isn't mine," Honthorst said, "but one of my pupils', a German youth called Sandrart."

"He is very talented. I would like to meet him to tell him so."

"I shall send for him at once. You'll make him very happy."

"Look," Pieter said while they waited for the young man, "if you cannot come with me, why don't you give me this youth as a guide? I don't like to travel alone. Perhaps you could do without him for a few weeks. Of course I would bear his expenses."

"I would do anything for you, Mynheer."

Sandrart arrived in a little while and blushed red at Pieter's praise. When he was told about the excursion, he could only stammer his joy. Then, after being guest of honor at the St. Luke Guild of Utrecht and listening to four long eulogies, Pieter set out one hot July morning through Holland in the company of the young German painter. He thought Sandrart would make a good "cover" to demonstrate the innocence of his plans. The young man was a very pleasant companion; Pieter liked to teach, and Sandrart was full of eager curiosity. It was pleasant, too, to watch his unaffected happiness; every day he tried to find an opportunity to express his gratitude to Pieter.

On July 24 they reached Delft—the date set by Gerbier. Pieter said to Sandrart while they were approaching the city:

"We must look out at the inn for a friend of mine, a painter called Gerbier. He's Flemish, but he lives abroad. I have some business to transact with him; he wants to buy some antiques from me for a rich patron."

"I have a cousin," Sandrart replied, "who lives in London and deals in such matters. He has most distinguished clients: Christina of Sweden, the King of England, the Duke of Buckingham. . . ."

"Oh. And what's your cousin's name?"

"Leblond. The Duke of Buckingham usually buys through him."

"You know, my boy, that is very interesting. The Duke is Gerbier's patron—Gerbier acts as his secretary—and the Duke wants to buy my antiques. A strange coincidence. We shall tell Gerbier to pass on this piece of business to your kinsman."

"Oh, master, you overwhelm me with your kindness."

When the carriage pulled up in front of the inn, Pieter was amazed to see that Gerbier was standing in the door with the Abbé Scaglia at his side. They greeted Pieter warmly.

"Allow me to present my traveling companion, the painter Sandrart. We are both rather hungry. When the luggage has been taken up to our rooms, we must sit down, eat, and have a talk."

When they had taken their places in the paneled room, Pieter turned at once to Gerbier:

"This young friend of mine is a cousin of M. Leblond who often deals with your master in antiques."

"Really? Leblond is most useful and trustworthy. I know him well."

"I am glad to hear that, for I wanted to ask you to give M. Leblond a share in our transaction. I know that this isn't a simple matter, as you have your own interests to look after. But we shall discuss it later."

"Gladly. Have you had an enjoyable tour?"

"Excellent. I am studying Dutch painting, and I have met some excellent men at Utrecht. I am sure it will be a most valuable experience."

He discussed the Utrecht painters at length. After their meal each of them went to his room. Sandrart vanished. Pieter, Scaglia, and Gerbier sat down to talk.

"May I know to what I owe this pleasure, Reverend Father?" Pieter asked.

"I can tell you to whom. The Duke. He considers that the King of Spain cannot prescribe to him whom he shall entrust with negotiations. I am staying here to the end. What do you think of the events in France?"

"What events?"

"Haven't you heard yet? The Duke found out that Richelieu was planning something against him. Accordingly, acting on the idea that attack is the best defense, he appeared with the English fleet off the French coast. He attacked the island of Ré and took it, except for one small fort. While we are sitting here, he is probably besieging it."

"So the Anglo-French war has begun?" Pieter asked quietly.

"Yes. Therefore it is more important than ever for the Duke to come to a settlement with Spain."

Pieter pondered quickly this unexpected turn. The Duke of Buckingham had forestalled the Franco-Spanish attack on England. He did not know—nor did his representatives sitting here—that Spain had already made an alliance with Richelieu. Olivarez was certain to attack the English. Perhaps while they were discussing peace here. But he must not let his opponents suspect anything.

"Well, let's begin, gentlemen. But first: what am I to tell young Sandrart?"

"He can write to his kinsman," Gerbier laughed, "that I magnanimously surrender the business to him. But don't tell him yet—let him think we are sitting here for days discussing whether I shall do so or not. The Duke's idea was an excellent one, this buying of your antiques. But he really would like to have your collection."

"But I don't want to sell it. I'll ask an unreasonably high price. Poor

Leblond won't make any money on this transaction. Well, shall we begin? . . . First point. . . . The Spanish-Dutch agreement on our overseas commerce. . . ."

They negotiated for two hours every day for a week. The rest of the day they spent in walking, driving, bathing, and looking at the town. Sandrart had left, after writing to his cousin about the big piece of business coming his way. Pieter tried to draw out the discussions as the King had commanded, but he negotiated seriously, with the sincere desire of achieving peace. Gerbier and Scaglia were surprisingly obliging on every point. They wanted to end things quickly, and Pieter knew that their hope was vain. When they had dealt with the last point, they rubbed their hands happily.

"Thank God," the Abbé said, "that we have got so far. This means peace. So Monsieur Rubens takes the protocol at once to the Archduchess, I go through Germany, while Monsieur Gerbier stays here and waits for the answer from Brussels. After that only the signatures will remain. Gentlemen, I can tell you frankly: it is a great thing to make peace. I am sure you both feel the same."

Gerbier nodded with conviction, Pieter assented even more loudly, but not very sincerely. He hurried back to Brussels and submitted a detailed report.

"I am heart-broken," the Archduchess said. "This is an excellent peace. I ought to sign it at once. And now I must send it to Madrid, and I am certain to receive instructions to dilly-dally. But how can I? Go home, my poor Rubens. Let us hope for the best."

Gerbier wrote one letter after another from Delft, begging for a reply, any reply at all, so that he should not return with empty hands to England. And Pieter could only answer that he, too, was waiting for a decision from Spain.

The answer of King Philip was brought by the Marquis Diego Leganez Don Mexia. Pieter, called to Brussels, reported to the sturdy, broad-shouldered man with the square chin, the supercilious look, and the great, unruly mass of curly hair.

"I've seen a few pictures of yours," Don Diego began. "I take it you have spent a long time in Italy."

"Yes, Your Excellency. But how did you guess?"

"Because you have learned a great deal from Titian and Raphael. By the way, I imagined you to be quite a different sort of man."

"Why, Your Excellency?"

"Your work is full of the joy of life. Your women are all fleshly and sensual. I imagined you as a greedy man, enjoying life, paunchy, heavy-bodied, a great eater and drinker. I am quite astonished that you are so different from the picture I had formed of you."

"As Your Excellency honors me by discussing my humble person, I may say that I know few more temperate men than myself. I eat little and seldom taste spirits. I love life, for life is good, but I love prudently. Painting is different. On canvas I never feel sated. I think that's where I get my real fill of life."

"And what about women?" Don Diego asked with a slight sneer.

"For seventeen years I was married to the best woman in the world and never deceived her. Small, sordid adventures merely disgust me."

"How old are you, Rubens?"

"Just fifty."

"Oh, then you will have your troubles to face yet. Sooner or later you will discover that paint and canvas are not enough. But we can talk about life and art later—let's come to the point. His Majesty desires that the Duke of Buckingham should be informed of the Franco-Spanish alliance. We cannot hide the matter any longer. But that isn't all. I must ask something of you on my own responsibility, after discussing the matter with Her Highness and the Marquis Spinola. You must write the letter in such a way that . . . how can I express it . . . that the Duke will not think the whole matter definitely closed. I think we understand each other. Write briefly. Bring me the draft this afternoon at four. Good-by for the present."

Pieter realized only in the anteroom the strong personality of Don Diego. His statements had been like military commands. Pieter drafted the letter and presented it in the afternoon.

M. Gerbier, your letter of the 6th has arrived and was well received, but as for the answer you demand to your letter of the 9th, I am afraid that nothing can be said at the moment which would indicate progress. The arrival of Don Diego Mexia has brought news of a treaty signed by the Kings of Spain and France for the mutual defense of their countries. Nevertheless, Her Highness has not changed

her attitude and wishes to continue her endeavors, for she desires nothing better than a just peace for Europe. His Excellency the Marquis is also prepared to do everything to this end. If the same thing can be said on England's side, then our correspondence may continue and we may exchange views at any favorable opportunity. Awaiting your reply, I commend myself to your favor and remain,

Your affectionate obedient servant,

P. Rubens.

"Excellent," Don Diego said, "I can suggest no alteration. But write a few polite, regretful phrases to the duke, too. No need to show it to me. And don't meet Gerbier for some time, as you have roused attention in Delft."

"That is surprising, for there were no official persons in the town."

"You can never tell. You were watched from the moment you crossed the frontier. While you were negotiating at Delft, the Venetian and French Ambassadors at The Hague were already talking about it. The Duke of Orange protested bitterly to Sir Dudley; he discovered that Sir Dudley had obtained your passport. Sir Dudley had to invent a story that you were selling some collection or other to Buckingham."

"Your Excellency, that wasn't a story. At this very moment I am in correspondence with His Grace's agent, M. Leblond. But I have asked a rather high price—a hundred thousand guilders."

"Well, that's certainly high. And what does the collection contain?"

Rubens began to give a cursory answer, but Don Diego interrupted him with many questions and proved himself to be quite a connoisseur.

"You, too, are a collector, Your Excellency?"

"A passionate one. I mainly collect timepieces, but I collect other things, too. What coin was that Roman one you mentioned?"

A quarter of an hour later Pieter was forced to acknowledge that Don Diego knew more about old coins and gems than he did. He spoke of pictures and statues with the same wide knowledge.

"I have just remembered," he said suddenly, "I want you to paint me. But I must tell you beforehand that I have no time for sittings."

"That will be difficult, Your Excellency."

"No, it won't. You can make sketches while we talk."

Pieter, of course, complied with the request. While his pencil flew over the paper, he asked:

"Your Excellency, I hope you will not take the question amiss: can peace be achieved in spite of all this?"

"It can and it can't. The position of the countries involved should make it possible, but their leaders are moved by passion and not by realistic interests, with the single exception of Richelieu. Every action of Olivarez springs from his Anglophobia. When your memorandum was discussed in the Council of State. . . ."

"My memorandum? In the Spanish Council of State?"

"Certainly. And the majority liked it enormously. But Olivarez is a clever man. In half an hour he had a majority against your propositions. Richelieu, too, won him through his hate of the English. As for the Duke of Buckingham, he is only moved by his notorious infatuation."

"Infatuation? For whom?"

"Don't you know? His Grace has fallen madly in love with the wife of Louis XIII. Queen Anne refused his attentions. Rumor says that there was some scandal. Buckingham wants to revenge himself for his failure. Olivarez, on the other hand, was greatly incensed that a mere duke should dare to force his attentions on a Spanish Infanta. Since 1618, for the past nine years, the European war has been raging unabated. If you ask me when it will end, I can only tell you: never. We cannot expect world peace at any time. Even if peace is made here, strife will break out somewhere else. But one can plan peace temporarily between two countries—perhaps even between Spain and England. Buckingham wishes it. Something must happen for Olivarez also to desire it. It may happen tomorrow. . . ."

"Your Excellency, I have hated force, blood, death since my early childhood and loved peace. You say, world peace is impossible. Why? Is human nature fundamentally wicked and aggressive?"

"I have no great opinion of human nature, but it's wrong to overestimate either its wickedness or goodness. Still, mankind is a poor, helpless, primitive mass which limps along blindly in the world, the slave of mysterious powers, the stars, the signs of the heavens. A comet may send peasants rushing at each other with axes and cause kings to insult ambassadors. We count for less in the universe than flies."

"Pardon me, Your Excellency, but I don't think mankind should be valued so low. God so loved mankind that He sent His Only Son for a time to become a man."

"That doesn't prove much. What if He loves the stars so much that He makes His Son a star for a time? God loves everything. He is infinite love. But man has abused that love. Did you ever consider why rich people keep dwarfs? To look at them again and again and feel the satisfaction of being tall, powerful, magnificent; and yet they are the invisible notes in creation. When they whirl madly, they think they are making war, and yet it is merely a storm sweeping them along. There won't be world peace ever, my friend. The golden age exists only in poetry. But perhaps tomorrow or in ten years the tension caused by mysterious forces will cease on a certain region of the earth. Let us hope that the Spanish Empire will be that region."

"If that is so, my work is a waste of time. Why should I try to achieve peace when it doesn't depend on men at all?"

"Because you must be prepared for the suitable moment."

"And why make peace if human beings are so unimportant?"

"Mankind isn't important, but each individual is, to himself. Make peace for yourself, not others."

"Here lies the chief difference between us, Don Diego. I work for peace because I love men."

"I work for it because I am selfish. I hate poverty. But that is unimportant. The main thing is that we would love peace. You know what is the most important requisite to achieve it? Force. A strong man cannot be threatened. Spain isn't strong enough today. Now let me tell you of a matter in which I need your help. I know you have great influence. I need every city, every province to help. Who is your Mayor? Oh, yes, Rockox. Well, you must work on him to agree to my plan. I worked it out in Paris as I lay in bed after an accident. My idea is that the different parts of the Spanish Empire must become a military unity. Each province must contribute a certain number of mercenaries to the common army of the Empire, while retaining the right of choosing the officers and its special language of command. In that way Castille, the Indies, Flanders, Brabant, Aragon, Valencia, Catalonia, Portugal, Naples, Sicily, and Milan could keep a hundred and forty thousand men under arms—the biggest army in the world. And peace would be assured. . . ."

Pieter had finished four sketches, and Don Diego examined them carefully.

"You have a master's touch," he said. "There is only one man in Spain who may be your equal. His name is Velasquez."

"I have heard of him," Pieter said. "I would be most grateful to you if you would describe him, Your Excellency."

"There is nothing much to say about him. He is a quiet, honest man, still under thirty. He came from Seville to Madrid as a court painter. He paints reality, he is merciless in the presentation of reality, and his means of expression are unlimited. It would be a fine thing if you two could meet. He would be a worthy friend for you. When you have painted my portrait, I am going to show it to him."

Isabella, who received Pieter next, was sympathetic.

"I am very sorry for you, my friend. I can understand what it means if someone fails after years of steadfast work. I have little hope that our negotiations can continue."

"Your Highness, I am stubbornly hopeful. *Dum spiro, spero*. Perhaps I shall die without realizing my dreams, but I shall work for it until my last breath."

"You are a strange man, Don Pedro. I thought you would be deeply depressed; indeed I had prepared a different consolation for you. But even so I won't change my mind."

"Whatever it is, Your Highness, I shall be most grateful."

"Well, you ought to be, for this is a great commission. I have little money, but I shall get somehow the thirty thousand guilders I need. I don't want to bargain, so I have reckoned out the cost, knowing how much you received for the pictures you painted for the French Queen. I only want fourteen pictures. To begin at the beginning, I have made a vow to decorate with tapestries the Madrid nunnery of the Royal Ladies of the True Faith. I have already considered the subject. For me the Holy Communion is the greatest thing in our beloved faith. Paint me fourteen pictures about the Eucharist—the workshop of Jan Raes can weave the tapestries here in Brussels. Can you do it? I require it at once."

"It is impossible, Your Highness; but I shall do it. I am always happy to attempt the impossible for Your Highness."

"Splendid. Well, let us discuss the subjects now. Take down these notes. . . ."

Pieter spent several more days in Brussels, so as to be at hand if any important communication should arrive from Gerbier. He had long talks

with Don Diego and Spinola. The war news was again alarming. The Dutch had been threatening the fortress of Grol, which was the key to the communications between Antwerp and the German Empire. The fortress held out a long time, but in the end was taken by the Prince of Orange. The fortunes of war changed constantly, but the dearness of everything, the general misery and poverty were constants.

All the time money flowed in a golden stream into Pieter's lap. Monasteries, churches, guilds still ordered pictures; there were still rich men able to afford a Rubens portrait. Leblond wrote to Pieter that the Duke of Buckingham accepted the price he had named for his collection. Pieter felt embarrassed, for he had loved every piece of his carefully collected treasures; but the high offer tempted him. He brooded over it for a while and then resigned himself to the sale, which had originally been a diplomatic ruse. Even after deducting Leblond's ten per cent commission, the real value of the collection was considerably less than ninety thousand guilders. And he had sufficient other treasures and objects of art in his house; a few days' careful work again filled the empty shelves and walls. At the same time certain debtors paid up, so that within a few weeks two hundred thousand guilders were added to the Rubens fortune.

Painting and trips to Brussels occupied all his time. Whenever he could snatch an hour for himself he spent it with his sons. And when he had to attend yet another Fourment wedding, he dressed for the ceremony unwillingly. He grudged the time, nor did he like the idea of meeting Helen again.

"Until now you have married off your daughters at a few years' interval," he told Mevrouw Fourment when he greeted her, "but now weddings get more and more frequent. This is the second this year."

"Yes, the one before the last," the excited mother replied. "Now we shall have a few years' pause. When Helen is married, we shall have done our duty."

Helen was among the wedding party in her fair beauty. Pieter purposely avoided meeting her alone, though she showed in little ways that she would have liked an intimate talk. Pieter purposely emphasized her youth and his own fifty years. She did not like being treated as a child. Pieter was pleased with himself; yes, this was the right way; it had been a silly emotional storm which had obsessed him with this young girl. But when he stole a glance at her, his old desire once more transfixed his heart

with a sudden pang: he would give a great deal if he could paint only once that lovely girlish body. He remembered what Don Diego had told him: a man who repressed his desires for many years would have his troubles with them later. No, he did not want to fight his desires. He had no time; he needed his attention, time, energy for other purposes. The wise man did not defy danger simply to prove his heroism. It was more heroic to conquer yourself and avoid danger.

A few days later he passed the Church of St. Walpurga. Suddenly he was transfixed by the memory of a long past moment; he had walked in solemn procession through this door, with Bella on his arm, when his altarpiece had been consecrated. He turned and went into the Church. He stopped behind a pillar and thought of Bella, the woman who had shared his life until little more than a year ago. No, with that memory in his heart he could not marry again. He crossed himself, bent his knee in front of the altar, and glanced up at it. He felt a sudden curiosity; he had not seen his own painting for a long time. Now he examined it intently and began to shake his head. No, it could not remain like this. The background to the Cross was bad, the lower left corner was empty. Striking faults. And yet Van der Geest, that fine critic, who obtained this commission for him, had considered it a masterpiece.

He did not rest until he had gained the unwilling permission of the Dean to have the church locked up while he repaired the faults he alone saw. He darkened the background of the Cross, repainted the figure of one of the executioners, and introduced a dog in the lower left corner. Then he sent for Van Dyck, who had returned to Antwerp and asked for his opinion.

"The picture is much better," Anthony said. "But I am amazed at you, master. I am only interested in a picture as long as I am painting it. Or rather, I am only concerned with the delight painting gives me. I would be unable to work on a canvas I had finished so long ago. When I have sent a picture from my studio, I feel that it has started an independent life of its own."

"What about future ages, Anthony? Why should someone in a hundred years—let us say my great-grandson, who also may be a painter—stand here and say: 'Well, the old man spoiled this thoroughly, the lower left corner of the composition is quite empty.'? The picture, canvas, frame, and paint, belong to the Walpurga church. But the creation is mine. If I

feel that it might be detrimental to my fame, I have the right to correct it. More than that: it is a duty to myself."

"Strange. I don't feel that duty."

They stood side by side and avoided each other's eyes. They felt for the first time that the paths of master and pupil had parted. And, while they stood there silently, Pieter thought that a mother might feel the same when her daughter married.

IX

Fortune did not favor the Duke of Buckingham. After he had taken the Isle of Ré, he installed himself before La Rochelle and began to incite the French Huguenots against Louis XIII. They flocked to his flag, and those who could not reach him rose in their own districts. But Richelieu would not yield. The King himself took the field, and the Cardinal was appointed commander in chief of the army. His Eminence exchanged his robes for military garb and proved as good a general as a politician. The Duke of Buckingham was unable to hold his ground. After a bloody battle he had to flee to his ships. The English fleet was glad to escape on the favorable breeze.

In Brussels this turn of affairs raised great hopes. It seemed easier to discuss peace with a defeated England. During the conversations at the archducal palace, which Pieter often attended, the idea slowly emerged that it might be useful to have a serious talk with the Madrid government; perhaps Olivarez could be made to see sense. Cardinal della Cueva was still walking about grimly in the corridors, his ascetic face showing the old merciless desire for war and revenge. But everybody else hated war, even Spinola, the general. The clever Genoan had won many battles; now his ambition spurred him to greater victories: he longed to triumph over the all-powerful Olivarez. He was popular in the villages of Brabant and Flanders; the peasants loved their kindly and peaceable Isabella but hated Madrid. Don Diego had little success with his ambitious plan of organizing an imperial army. He argued that his plan would mean immediate help in the Spanish Netherlands, for by it any part of the Spanish Empire which was attacked would be relieved of all war costs and helped by the other domains of King Philip IV. Brussels would be able to fight free of cost against Holland and would certainly triumph with the huge army he planned. But his arguments did not prevail. The Flemish and Brabant towns did not want to triumph. They wanted peace. The enemy once more threatened Antwerp, having installed himself at Santfliet. Both parties started to build forts here. Spinola decided that with the consent,

more at the request, of the Archduchess he would go to Madrid and undertake the task of changing the policy of Olivarez. He would ask for authority to discuss peace with England. Richelieu must resign himself to the fact that he could not carve up England with Olivarez, nor present Ireland to Pope Urban.

Pieter took part in many of these rather conspiratorial discussions. He took care to provide parting gifts for Spinola: engravings of the general's portrait and also a portrait by Velasquez of Olivarez, intended for the powerful favorite of King Philip IV.

He had already started on the pictures of the Eucharist. While he prepared the sketches, his collaborators enlarged and started to paint them. While Pieter painted, he was continuously wondering what success Spinola would have.

Gerbier suddenly wrote again to say that the Duke of Buckingham would like to reopen negotiations. It was not as if England had been beaten—the Huguenots were still sitting in La Rochelle, England was stronger than ever and desired peace simply from humanitarian considerations. His Grace had worked out new terms, the enclosed new basis for negotiations was his own, and he would like to discuss it with Rubens. Pieter was greatly excited by the letter and sent it at once to Spinola. The King of Spain would see that the real ruler of England, the favorite of Charles I, considered the painter Rubens a good enough intermediary. The situation was more favorable than ever. Though the English maintained that they had lost only two hundred and fifty men—instead of thousands—they did not deny the loss of forty-four standards. This gave a good enough idea of their losses.

He knew that he would have to wait a long time for Spinola's answer. About the same time news came that the last Duke of Mantua, whom Pieter had painted as a young boy, had died without issue.

"This means a new war," Pieter told his father-in-law. "According to family custom the Mantuan inheritance now passes to a distant kinsman, the Duke of Nevers, who is a Frenchman. Even if we are allies, Olivarez cannot permit French influence to gain a foothold so close to Milan. We long for peace, but new wars come almost every day."

Another war threatened in the neighborhood. In the course of their complicated and bloody campaigns the troops of the Emperor had reached the Dutch frontier. The Catholic soldiery was now face to face with the

Protestant population. Fighting might break out at any moment. Luck turned against the Dutch: a hundred and fifty of their ships were destroyed in a single storm.

One bitterly cold January morning a stranger called on Pieter. He introduced himself as Vosberghen, the representative of the King of Denmark. He had been sent by His Majesty.

"I have heard of you. The other day there was some difficulty about your passport," Pieter said, "and I was glad to be of help. I feel honored that His Majesty is interested in my art. What is His Majesty's desire?"

"It isn't your art, sir, although the King is doubtless a great admirer of it. This time I am on a political errand."

"From the King of Denmark? To me?"

"Don't be startled, sir. It is an open secret that you are in constant touch with Her Highness and that you conduct negotiations in her name. Therefore I came straight to Antwerp . . ."

"I am at your service, sir, though you overestimate my influence."

"Leave that to me. I want to ask you to plead our cause with Her Highness. The King of Denmark would like to discuss peace terms through you."

Pieter felt a little dazed but showed no trace of his confusion.

"Forgive me, sir, and don't take it as a lack of confidence, but. . ."

"My credentials? Here they are."

He spread them on the table. They were in order.

"Thank you. Could you inform me regarding the basis of the offer? It might be unacceptable."

"I can assure you, that will not be the case. England, Holland, and Denmark are allies: their interests are common. No separate peace can be made with any of them, only with the three together. I can assure you that this is the unchangeable attitude of these three countries."

Pieter was tempted to remark that the Duke of Buckingham was willing to leave out Denmark from any pact, but he restrained himself.

Vosberghen continued:

"I am a Dutchman, sir, and Sir Dudley Carleton could tell you that I am related to three important statesmen, and also closely to the Prince of Orange. I see only one obstacle to starting the negotiations at once: the King of Spain is not willing to recognize Holland as a republic, while the Dutch for their part are not willing to consider him their ruler. I have

a compromise to propose. Let Holland call Philip her King but add at once '*extra possessione*,' while Philip IV will avoid mentioning the Dutch Republic but speak of 'the third allied power.' So if you could introduce me to Her Highness. . . ."

"I shall try. As soon as I receive a reply from her I shall let you know."

"Thank you. I shall wait here in Antwerp, though unfortunately I cannot wait long. Here is my name and address."

Pieter sent a courier to Brussels and received an answer immediately. Isabella was delighted with the offer. Rubens should inform himself of the peace plan, but at the same time report in detail to Spinola at Madrid. At their next meeting the Danish representative presented a long memorandum of the peace terms, mentioning the slight disadvantages and immense advantages for every country concerned. Then he took his leave, having agreed to settle what points remained by frequent correspondence. He had not looked at a single picture, nor asked one superficially polite question—but this Pieter found rather flattering. His fame as an artist needed no enhancement, but his fame as a diplomat filled him with boundless happiness.

The deep rumble of guns could be heard frequently in Antwerp. The Prince of Orange appeared himself at the Dutch fort built on the banks of the Scheldt. Immediately after he had left, Don Carlos Coloma, the Spanish general who had been sent from Madrid to fill Spinola's place, appeared on the other side. Antwerp was like a disturbed anthill. Everybody was afraid of a mercenary revolt, for the soldiers had not received their pay for months. But now it was announced that within a few days a large sum of money would arrive from Madrid, and the news quieted the grumbling troops. Nor was it a mere promise, for Madrid had sent word that three millions had been sent with a strong military escort. On the other side, the Prince of Orange paid frequent visits of inspection to the fort. Peasants who came to Antwerp told that once a cannon ball had fallen so close to him that it tore off the leg of his personal servant.

As soon as the weather had improved, Pieter took the sketches of the Eucharist to the Archduchess. She was enchanted by them and spent a long time inspecting the designs. She glanced up at Pieter and noticed that he was fidgeting.

"Is something the matter?"

"I am in great pain, Your Highness. My knee pains me. I had an attack

once before in Paris. The French doctor said it was gout, but I hardly believed him. Now it is certain."

"Well, I can sympathize with your trouble for I suffer from gallstones. I am unable to eat and seldom sleep. But time is passing, and we must resign ourselves to it. We are getting old, Rubens, that's the truth of the matter. But I must scold you for traveling in such weather if you are ill."

"I was in no pain when I set out, Your Highness. It attacked me on the way. But now I can hardly bear to wait to get into bed and put something hot on my leg."

"Don't waste time here, hurry home. And let me know how you get on."

Pieter traveled to Antwerp wrapped up in blankets and furs with a hot brick against his feet. At home he went to bed with excruciating pains in his right knee and leg.

On the third day a court lackey called on him, bringing a parcel from the Archduchess. It contained six choice pearls, Isabella's special gift in reward for the sketches. The lackey inquired how the invalid was getting on. Pieter felt better, though his arm was bandaged; the doctor had bled him. But next day a letter from Spinola arrived which made him even happier than the archducal gift had done. One passage especially delighted him:

I request you to quote in your letters as prominently as possible the following as coming from me: "Now I am certain that His Most Catholic Majesty has a strong inclination for peace with the states which are at war with Spain. This will mean great changes within a short time. We must use every opportunity while I am in Madrid, for I cannot guarantee results after I have left." Write this both to the Danish Ambassador and the Duke of Buckingham.

The letter described how the King had received him, and there was also news of his future son-in-law. Don Diego had been married to Polyxena Spinola. Next day the Marquis Inojosa, President of the Council of the Indies, died, and Don Diego was immediately appointed in his place, which meant that he could present the views of Brussels with considerable authority.

Next day Pieter wrote both to Buckingham and Vosberghen. He included in both letters Spinola's important pronouncement. He realized how important speed was if success were to be achieved. The methods of

warfare were growing more and more merciless. Although there was an international agreement regarding the humane treatment of prisoners of war, the Dutch simply drowned them in the sea. Isabella had protested repeatedly and energetically at The Hague, but had then lost her patience. She proclaimed that for every Flemish soldier so murdered she would have two Dutchmen executed. These reprisals had already begun.

At last the tardy spring arrived, and Pieter's pains vanished. He once more started to work on the pictures of the Eucharist. But his mind was occupied chiefly with politics. A new war broke out: Mantua was attacked from two sides, on the west by Spanish troops and on the north by the imperial army. The names which figured in the news reminded him of his youth. The fortress of Casale, where he had ridden so often, was being besieged. And, when it was reported that in consequence of the late Duke's spendthrift administration, the fortress had little food and even less ammunition, memories returned of the old Mantuan court with its theatrical parades and the glittering pomp of Duke Vincenzo's retinue. The little prince whose portrait he had painted had become the same kind of ruler as his father, or rather even worse, for Duke Vincenzo had been able to squeeze money out of Chieppio for pictures even in troubled times. But his son had sold the famous collection to the King of England.

There were signs that the diplomatic world now considered Pieter the semiofficial but intimate representative of the Archduchess. The King of England, being greatly interested in the Mantuan affair, dispatched an envoy extraordinary to Mantua, Lord Carlisle. His Lordship went first to The Hague; and then planned to continue his journey through the Spanish Netherlands. He wrote to Pieter asking him to procure a passport. Pieter obtained it at once. He knew when Lord Carlisle was due to arrive at Brussels, so he chose the same time to take the finished pictures of the Eucharist to Isabella. But His Lordship did not arrive, and Pieter could not wait. When he returned to Antwerp, he called on Van Dyck. They had been talking less than five minutes when a liveried lackey announced two foreign gentlemen. One of them was Lord Carlisle, who had stopped on his way to Mantua for the express purpose of meeting Pieter. As he had not found him at home he had gone to see Van Dyck.

"It was God's wish that we should meet after all, my dear sir," His Lordship said. "Let me introduce Mr. Boswell."

"Oh, we know each other well," Pieter answered.

Mr. Boswell was none other than Sir Dudley Carleton's secretary. They were soon talking animatedly. Boswell was a pleasant, modest young man, but Pieter found Lord Carlisle little to his liking. His politeness was too elaborate, yet he abused at great length all the people who were mentioned in the conversation. If he was unable to say anything bad about them, he kept silent. Among other things Boswell related that Sir Dudley had been raised to the peerage and had adopted the title of Lord Dorchester.

Pieter was unable to discover what Lord Carlisle wanted. He accompanied him to Brussels and was present at his audience with the Archduchess, but this did little to clarify the position. His Lordship said that he was making a six months' tour in connection with a special mission, and planned to visit several courts. He was to visit the Duke of Piedmont, to whom he was taking, in the name of King Charles, a rare diamond set in a beautiful ring. The Archduchess was much intrigued by this; and, when His Lordship took his leave, she said:

"I would like your journey through our territory to be as pleasant as possible. Rubens will accompany you at least as far as Namur. He will help you to obtain anything you may require."

She winked at the painter, and Rubens nodded. He understood his task. He accompanied Lord Carlisle; but, although they had many conversations, he was unable to discover the real reason for his journey. Finally he asked Boswell:

"I'll tell you, sir," the secretary replied. "But don't repeat it to anyone."

"You know that you can rely upon my discretion."

"Our government at home is bored by Lord Carlisle. So they sent him away with this diamond ring to get rid of him for six months."

This was the "great political secret." Pieter had spent days in a swaying carriage to no purpose. But he shrugged away his annoyance and went back to Antwerp and work. He was waiting impatiently for Spinola, but the Marquis did not arrive. It was very difficult to feed the Duke of Buckingham and the Danish Ambassador on empty promises. On the other hand Spinola's long delay was understandable. Olivarez was a hard nut to crack. Spinola knew that it was not enough to obtain from the King a few pacific utterances; he had to stay in Madrid until these utterances had practical consequences. If he left, Olivarez would gain

once more complete ascendancy over the King, and nothing would be changed.

There was nothing to be done except to wait. Peace was still distant, and war marched on with giant steps. In La Rochelle the Huguenots were holding out stubbornly. All Europe was amazed that a single fortress could resist the entire French army and prevent it from going to the help of the new Duke of Mantua. The latter was losing his strongholds one after another. In the Italian campaign the soldiers remained unpaid but were permitted to plunder the Jews; but the Gentiles were faring little better, for the Jews were the pawnbrokers and their Christian clients lost their pawned goods. According to a Nuremburg report, human skin had appeared in a tanner's tent in the local market. It was readily bought instead of animal pelts, for skins had become scarce.

Yet life in Antwerp was still peaceful. People had become used to the distant gunfire. Painters, sculptors, engravers still frequented the St. Luke Guild, and Grapheus, the waiter, served the steins of beer with a still haughtier air since De Vos had painted him. Van Dyck was working for the Church of St. Augustine; his altarpiece was a great success. He was always gloomy these days; Pieter tried to cheer him up:

"What's the matter with you, Anthony?"

"I really don't know. My painting alone keeps me going. Recently I made my will. I have only two sisters, and both are nuns. I have left my entire fortune to them; and, if they die, the poor get everything. I shall pass from this world without leaving a trace behind."

Pieter laughed and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Not quite without a trace. Your work is sufficient to keep your name alive. But why don't you marry?"

"Impossible," Anthony shook his head. "God has cursed me by making me impossibly fastidious. No one is good enough for me. I want a wife who is beautiful, intelligent, well educated, refined, spiritual, and who loves me to distraction. Is there such a woman in the world? It's easy for you, sir, you have two fine sons to give you joy. And you are interested in politics, which bore me. All I want to know is whether the Dutch are coming to Antwerp to set fire to my studio. Do you think there is a chance of that?"

"Not for the time being. You don't need to be anxious."

But Pieter himself began to grow anxious. Spinola was still in Madrid,

and the summer brought increased activity among the Dutch troops. Nine thousand infantrymen were in camp not far from Antwerp. Pinola did not even write. The Archduchess was worried. When Pieter called on her, he found her in a bad humor. She was again tortured by her gallstones and had had an unpleasant scene with the Papal Nuncio. It was fortunate that the money had arrived from Madrid to pay the soldiers; Antwerp was now well defended.

It was very hot, and the boys pestered Pieter to take them to Eeckeren, so he took a few days' holiday. Life was peaceful on the little estate. They rose with the sun and took a plunge into the lake. After a swim they rubbed one another with coarse towels until their skins glowed a healthy pink.

They breakfasted in the garden. Hendrijke, the old serving woman, brought them curdled milk in stone jars with black bread. A large dish was piled high with fruit. After breakfast there were riding lessons under Pieter's supervision. Then he took a ride himself. The horse ambled along with loose reins across the flowery meadows over which butterflies chased one another. The rider was lost in thought. He enjoyed the fresh air, the sun on his bare head. Again, as so often recently, he felt a strong desire to go to Italy. Perhaps by next spring, God would grant peace and he could take a long trip. He would revisit the lagoons of Venice, go to Florence to have a cool drink at the small osteria near the Palazzo Vecchio, stroll through Bologna, Padua, Ferrara, stay at Rome and revive all the memories of his youth; On his way back he would stop at Leghorn and Genoa, enjoy the sun, art, freedom from care. But all this could happen only if peace were achieved. . . .

At nine o'clock the boys returned from their ramble, hungry and full of talk. They were always hungry and ate more than their father. After a second breakfast they had their French lesson: an hour's conversation while taking a walk. Albrecht's mind was the more logical, his character calmer, more balanced than his brother's; he learned less quickly, but his memory was retentive. Nicolaas was more talented, but capricious, somewhat confused, warm-hearted, and rather sentimental. Neither of them showed any special aptitude for painting. Albrecht was attracted by the life of a courtier. He was fourteen, and it had been decided that he was to study law. Nicolaas changed his plans every six months. Last year he had wanted to become a bishop, then a captain of mercenaries,

now he dreamed of sailing the oceans. In the afternoon he could indulge in his nautical ambitions, for they again went bathing. The boys had built galleys of empty boxes and discarded planks. They wanted to stage a sea battle, but Pieter did not allow it, so they played at discovering America. Nicolaas was Columbus. He swam in the water pushing the galleys in front of himself, and he was supposed to discover America at a certain spot on the island. One side of the island was covered with rushes, the other with thick bushes, and both offered good hiding places. America was always in a different place, wherever his father and brother happened to be hiding. When Nicolaas found them after a brief or long search, they broke into Indian war whoops; they had stuck goose feathers in their hair and brandished pieces of wood which were supposed to be tomahawks. Columbus spoke to them in Spanish, whereupon they immediately embraced Christianity, and Nicolaas was ordained Archbishop of the Americas.

When the sun began to go down, Pieter ended the game. An English lesson came next, then the evening meal with country dishes and plenty of fruit. Afterward he read again while the children were allowed to run and play until sundown. They went to bed with the sun and slept like logs the moment they put their heads on the pillows.

Pieter had given orders that he was not to be troubled by letters or messages unless they came from the Brussels Court. One day a courier arrived, bearing a summons from the Archduchess for an immediate audience. He sent a horseman to Antwerp to Philips's widow asking her to send her son to spend some days with Albrecht and Nicolaas. Philips's son was now a youth of seventeen, a student of law who was to take up a post in the autumn. He arrived in the evening, and Pieter knew that he could safely leave his sons in his care. Next day he traveled to Brussels.

"There are great things in store for you, Rubens," the Archduchess said. "Spinola hasn't come back."

"He is still delaying, Your Highness?"

"No. His last letter says that he must stay where he is or risk everything. The King has also written. His Majesty says that before he comes to a final decision he wishes to be acquainted with every detail of the negotiations. So he commands you to collect every scrap of paper, every letter, protocol, note in whatever language, including those in cipher,

and send them directly to him. He will read everything carefully and then decide."

Pieter's brain worked at lightning speed behind his impassive face. He shook his head.

"This command cannot be fulfilled, Your Highness. First of all I haven't copies of every letter I sent. Secondly the correspondence is still going on; and, if I let the material out of my hand, I shall be unable to look up references, and my work will be greatly hampered. All this material would have to be copied and the letters in code deciphered. Naturally we cannot entrust this task to a stranger, while for me it would mean several months' work, taking into account my painting and other duties. Thirdly, the letters were accompanied by verbal discussions and without knowledge of what passed on these occasions the correspondence is unintelligible."

"Well then, what answer shall I send to His Majesty?"

"His Majesty should dispatch a trustworthy person to whom I could explain the whole matter and dictate the more important passages. This, too, would take several weeks. Or His Majesty could summon me to Madrid."

The Archduchess looked at him shrewdly, then smiled slowly.

"So you would like to go to Madrid, eh?"

"Very much," Pieter replied, a little shamefacedly.

"Well, I should like you to go too. Spinola, Mexia, and you could perhaps manage Olivarez. I shall write to the King today and put the matter to him in my own way. It is probable that His Majesty will call you to Madrid. Now, I shouldn't like you to be at any disadvantage there. I have long been considering a certain step, and this is the best moment to tell you that I am going to make you a Court Chamberlain."

Pieter showed no surprise. He bowed deeply, ceremoniously.

"Your Highness has made this the proudest day of my life."

"You deserve it, Rubens. I want to make it possible for you to sit at the same table as the King. Wherever you travel, you will be able to stay at the Flemish Embassy: you are entitled to appear at any court. Then again, an Excellency, which you have become in this moment, meets with more consideration in an argument than a painter. You have now become an official personage. Well, I shall send your certificate of appointment to Antwerp. One more thing: if the King decides to allow

you to visit Madrid, you must take him a gift in my name. It would also be good to take one gift in your own name. Choose eight good pictures of your own and prepare for the journey. I hope to God that you will be successful!"

The new Chamberlain was only shamming calmness: he was profoundly gratified by this distinction. He had never dreamed of becoming a Court Chamberlain—although such a title was the only thing that might armor his sensitive pride against slights.

He immediately visited his tailor to order a Chamberlain's uniform: broad-brimmed, black Spanish hat, a white "millstone" collar, black velvet jacket, black silk breeches, fastened with ribbons below the knee, black leather gauntlets, a sword, and a wide, black cloak. He ordered all this to be finished in a hurry; and, when three days later it was delivered, he had a long, broad mirror put beside his easel and painted a picture of Court Chamberlain Rubens. His hair was carefully curled, his beard trimmed to a point. And, staring at his reflection as at a stranger, he decided that this stranger was a handsome and distinguished man.

Three weeks later His Excellency was asked again to go to Brussels. He dressed in his ceremonial uniform and buckled on his sword. Isabella inspected him with an expert eye.

"That is satisfactory," she said. "At the Spanish Court they are most attentive to detail, I warn you."

"What is His Majesty's answer, Your Highness?"

"You are going. You must be ready in three weeks. Have you chosen the eight pictures? All right. You will be paid seven thousand five hundred pounds for them. I like my men to make money. But now let us discuss the main points."

After ninety minutes' conversation, the Infanta said:

"I want to ask you something, Rubens: don't stop anywhere on your way; above all, don't stop in Paris, for if you call on the Queen Mother she will keep you kicking your heels. I shall be most anxiously praying for the success of your efforts. . . ."

Pieter wanted to obey his mistress, but he had decided to stop at the famous La Rochelle. So he started somewhat earlier, although he had a great many things to settle before his departure. First of all he looked around for a secretary who was also a painter. His choice fell on Jan Cossiers, a most talented young artist who had traveled extensively in

France and Italy and also spoke several languages. He left the house and his sons in care of Panneels, another painter, a good businessman and most trustworthy. He handed him his accounts and books with a detailed inventory. Then he wrote a long letter to Velasquez, announcing his visit and asking for his good will during his stay in Madrid. He had to pay some farewell calls, and, when he got into the stagecoach, he felt exhausted.

The eight pictures were among his luggage—all of them had either been painted for himself or had not been commissioned. He had many such paintings at home; whenever the studio was not especially busy, he worked "for the reserve." In making the selection, he paid little attention to artistic merit, as he had a low opinion of the expert knowledge of the Spanish Court. He had not forgotten how the Duke of Lerma had insisted that three copies he had received were originals. But, as he had heard that Philip IV had a passion for hunting, he selected several in which animals appeared.

The journey was uneventful, Cossiers a pleasant companion. Crossing the French border, they took the coach for La Rochelle. They were stopped by the first line of pickets near it, and had to wait in the sweltering heat until a young officer arrived to examine their papers. They were permitted to enter the camp. Here a captain received them warmly.

"I have the honor of knowing you, Your Excellency. I have often seen you in the Palais Luxembourg, and of course I know the pictures in the gallery. I shall be glad to show you anything that interests you. . . ."

He sent for horses, and they rode a good way through the bustling camp until they reached some rocks. Here they dismounted and climbed a narrow path at the top of which the Atlantic Ocean opened before them in the brilliant sunshine. From this vantage point they saw the whole terrain. In the distance a long promontory with fortifications jutted into the sea. Galleys swung at anchor on the water.

"There are the Huguenots," the captain said, pointing toward the promontory.

There was no sign of war here. The silence was infinite, beneath the cliffs the sea murmured, while crickets chirped in the grass. There was a golden haze over the water.

"Where is the siege?" Pieter asked.

"This is the siege, sir. Our huge camp is blockading the Huguenots

from any contact with the mainland. At night it's even more impressive; boats with torches are rowed on the seas and fires burn on the galleys. This serves to prevent any smuggling in of food and to keep watch for the English fleet. For months Buckingham has been promising to relieve the Huguenots, but nothing has happened."

"But how has La Rochelle been able to hold out for more than a year?"

"We ourselves didn't think that they would still be fighting. But they were well provisioned. They are near to starvation now; only their faith in the British fleet keeps them going. We just sit here doing nothing. The soldiers eat and drink and enjoy the seaside. His Majesty spent some time with us and then returned to Paris. The Cardinal, too, has left us—and now we sit here like cats watching a mousehole."

"What about the defenders? They are all doomed, aren't they?"

"More or less. This warfare is merciless. But for the time being they even have access to the sea. They often slip down to fish, and slink back again when our patrol boats come up."

After being shown the batteries, the camp hospitals, and the luxurious tents of the commanders, Pieter and Cossiers continued their journey, staying one night only in Paris. For days they sat entranced, watching the changing landscape. After fertile plains and idyllic valleys the road began to climb and grow rocky. They crossed the Pyrenees and descended through a fantastic landscape; millions of curious boulders flanked the highroad and lay scattered over the sloping meadows. Villages became more frequent. One morning Pieter touched Cossiers' arm and pointed to the left, where the huge Escorial, the former home of Philip II, father of the Archduchess Isabella, rose in grim majesty on the mountainside.

The same day they reached Madrid. Pieter hardly recognized it, so many changes had been made since he last visited it. Whole new streets had sprung up, and the once small old city had been turned into a modern metropolis. When the coach stopped at the inn, a court clerk accosted them:

"Are you Don Pedro Paolo Rubens, sir?"

"Yes."

"The Marquis Spinola has received the express letter which Your Excellency sent from the frontier. Did you have a pleasant journey, sir?"

"Yes, thank you. This gentleman is my secretary."

"Welcome, *señor*. My orders are to take you to your quarters. No need to trouble yourself with the luggage, I shall take care of it. This carriage is waiting for us."

"Thank you. Where am I to stay?"

"Your Excellency is His Majesty's guest at the palace."

X

It was twenty-five years ago that he had seen this palace for the first time. He had never dreamed then that he would stay in it as the guest of the King of Spain.

After a long walk through corridors and up and down staircases he was led to a spacious, sunny room which would make an ideal studio. His bedroom was adjoining, and Cossiers had another room in the suite. A liveried lackey bowed deeply, announced that his name was Sancho and that he was to be at His Excellency's service during his stay.

"You may start at once, Sancho. Bring me some water to wash my hands. And, when the luggage arrives, you can help to unpack."

He had hardly dried his hands when someone knocked at the bedroom door. A young, modest, somewhat awkward man came in. Although he did not introduce himself, Pieter recognized him at once; it was Velasquez. He hastened to greet him with outstretched hands.

"Thank you for your letter," Velasquez said. "It made me very happy. . . . And now . . . now I am delighted that you are here."

There was something very likable in his shy fidgeting, which could not hide an inborn nobility of character. His high forehead was also strange, and the long face seemed to have no cheekbones, falling straight and narrow from the eye sockets. His thick, upturned mustache seemed incongruous. He wore a little "mouche" on his chin. The whole sallow appearance of the man showed the traces of frequent childhood ailments. He was not handsome, and yet he was definitely attractive.

"I have heard so much about you!" Pieter began. "Do sit down. . . . I have only just arrived, and my luggage hasn't turned up yet."

"Oh, you can take your time comfortably. I have brought you a message: Marquis Mexia sends you his greetings and asks you to have a good rest after your long trip. He expects you at three tomorrow afternoon—no arrangements have been fixed before then."

"Thank you, this respite will be most welcome."

Now his luggage arrived with a good deal of clatter. Pieter told Cosiers:

"Unpack everything in the studio and let me know when you have finished."

He closed the door and returned to his visitor.

"I have come to Madrid with great interest; the Spanish school of painting is famous in Flanders. But tell me, what are living conditions like here for artists?"

"Poverty is our trouble. I don't feel it much, for I have but few needs, and my official post assures me the little I want. But others complain about the growing scarcity of commissions. And it is even more difficult to collect the money for commissioned work."

"And yet you have excellent artists. Who is the best-known now?"

"Perhaps Herrera, of the older generation."

"I have heard his name. What kind of a man is he?"

"Strange enough," Velasquez replied. "He was my master in Seville, but I soon went over to Pacheco, who is my father-in-law. Herrera treated his apprentices rather badly; nor did we learn much from him, as he sometimes didn't paint for weeks—then again if he felt the urge he would work like a madman and pay no attention to us. But he is a very good painter. He has a primitive strength which is utterly Spanish. He is also an architect and engraver. His skill is uncanny. Perhaps a little too uncanny. Haven't you heard of the trouble he got into? He forged some money and was caught at it. . . ."

"Was he sent to prison?"

"No. He was working at the time in the Jesuit Church and had sanctuary there for months. Luckily the King was in Seville at that time—that is four years ago—and, when he was told of Herrera's plight, he pardoned him at once. . . ."

"That was a fine gesture for the King to make, since he knows little about painting. . . ."

"Knows little? Why do you say that? The King himself loves to paint and is a very good amateur. He takes regular lessons from a colleague of ours, the Dominican Father Juan Maino. Well, among our painters we also have Zurbaran, Canos, and my father-in-law. We had one or two excellent masters who are now dead, but my father-in-law is better fitted

to speak of them, as he is not only a painter, but a writer and a critic as well."

"None of the Spanish painters, I must say, interests me so much as you do."

"Don't embarrass me, *señor*," Velasquez said, blushing. "I really feel most unhappy when I am praised. I haven't discovered yet how to behave on such occasions. I loathe both sham modesty and cocksureness. You will see my work here in the palace, and can judge for yourself. I have already formed my judgment about you."

"You have? Where have you seen my work?"

"Didn't you know that you have some pictures here? For instance the equestrian portrait of the Duke of Lerma, then one of the Three Magi which belonged to some executed nobleman. . . ."

"Oh yes. I painted it originally for the city of Antwerp."

"Then I recently saw the portrait of the Marquis Mexia or rather, as he is now called, Count Leganez. You see, *señor* . . . I cannot . . . but . . . this is a red-letter day for me."

He was embarrassed and seemed relieved when Cossiers came in to report that the unpacking was done. Pieter presented him to his Spanish colleague and then showed the eight pictures to Velasquez, who spent a long time examining them.

"The King will be delighted," he said at last. "I told you that this was a red-letter day. . . ."

Now a new visitor arrived, a tall, white-haired man with a severe professorial manner. This was Pacheco, Velasquez' father-in-law and former master. After the introductions Pacheco at once took up his position before the pictures and proceeded to explain in polished sentences and with great fluency why they were masterpieces. Pieter thanked him politely.

"Father," Velasquez said, "*Señor* Rubens has asked about Spanish painters. I mentioned the younger ones, but you could speak better about your own generation."

Pacheco launched forth at once into a smooth and lengthy discourse. He mentioned Cespedes, Vasquez, and Roelas, describing and characterizing each in detail. Pieter listened with polite boredom. But he pricked up his ears at one name—El Greco.

"You knew El Greco, *señor*?"

"Of course. I visited him in Toledo."

"What is your opinion of him as a painter?"

"The question is: which painter you mean? For there are two El Grecos, the one before, the other after he went mad. The former I consider an extraordinary master. Those compositions in startling sulphurous yellows and violets were produced by a gigantic talent. But when he lost his mind he painted like a lunatic."

"What was his trouble?"

"He was born to trouble. In my opinion his life was ruined by a single remark: an admirer of his told him he painted like Titian. This hurt him deeply, as he considered it disparaging. He thought himself a much better painter than Titian. From that moment he strove to be original at all costs. When I visited him, he was already insane. It was very strange; he spoke wittily, humorously, entertainingly; he was extremely well educated. Then suddenly he said: 'I knew Titian well. He was a very pleasant old man, a pity that he could not draw.' Toward the end of his life he was doing quite crazy things; he kept flexible dummies and fixed them in impossible attitudes and painted them in mysterious double colors: light blue and yellow or white and violet-black. That El Greco was not a painter but a madman. The other one was magnificent. Have you seen any of his pictures?"

"A few, twenty-five years ago. I always found him alien and morbid. And I like only what is healthful."

"That's what I say. And what is real. The main trouble with painters is that they do not read enough, do not make detailed researches. The blunders they make! But let's drop the subject, or my blood will begin to boil. I hope I shall often see Your Excellency. Good-by for the present."

Old Pacheco stumped out, and Velasquez smiled apologetically.

"Don't be misled by his behavior, *señor*; he always acts as if he were quarreling with someone, although no one contradicts him. But he is really a most kind-hearted man, and for ten years he has been my father-in-law."

"Ten years? How old were you when you married?"

"Nineteen, and I have never regretted it, for I am very happy, and I feel happiest of all when I go home to my family after my work. . . ."

"Aren't you living in the palace, then?"

"No. His Majesty has provided me with lodgings in the town and with

a studio in the palace. Would you like to see it? But no, the light is failing. Perhaps tomorrow? I am sure you want to go to bed early and sleep late tomorrow morning."

"No, no, I am an early riser. May I ask you to do me a favor?"

"I am here to serve you. Is it about canvas or paint?"

"No, thank you; Cossiers can buy me whatever I need in the town. I should like you to get me a horse. I have taken a ride every morning for many years, and it would be hard to do without it now."

"That will be easy enough to arrange. The King is a great huntsman, and his stables are capacious. By the time you get up tomorrow, your valet, Sancho, will know where to take you for your ride. Would you like to look round the city tomorrow? I should be happy to act as your guide if you wish. Let us agree that I come to you in the morning when you have returned from your ride. And if you need anything, do honor me by telling me about it."

He took a clumsy farewell and even stumbled on the threshold. And Pieter, while he shared his evening meal with Cossiers, thought of himself at the age of twenty-six, a young painter, full of secret dreams, visiting Spain so many years ago. He was fifty-one now, but his dreams were as compelling as ever.

For half an hour next morning he cantered in the near-by riding school and then attended Mass. It was difficult to find the way back to his quarters, since the palace was huge. He asked several guards, all of whom told him:

"Cuarto bajo del principe."

This was the name of the wing where his rooms were. It was a veritable "artist's quarter"; with several studios. That of Velasquez was also here, but the Spanish painter usually arrived later. In the meantime Pieter sat down to study his notes and refresh his memory; the material he had to carry in his mind was immense; but, when he had run over it, he was sure he could pass any examination on it with credit.

Velasquez arrived about eight o'clock. Pieter asked him to explain to Cossiers the plan of the palace. The Spaniard drew a map of the complicated corridors and staircases, which Cossiers copied. Afterward he presented Pieter to the Court Steward, who was to arrange for the delivery of the eight pictures to the apartments of the King. At last they were ready to start sight-seeing.

"The sun is strong," Pieter said. "I reproach myself with keeping you from your work."

"Oh, I am thankful to get away from my studio. I like to take time off in the middle of a picture and meditate over it."

"Do you work fast? I am a very quick worker myself."

"I am extremely slow."

Velasquez was an excellent guide. He took Pieter to the Plaza de Palacio, from which the Calle Mayor, the main thoroughfare of Madrid, opened. People called it the "Reversed Indies" for one could get rid of one's gold very rapidly there. The shops were quite different from those in Antwerp; they were richer and more colorful, displaying more colonial produce, silverware, exotic fabrics. Pieter remarked to Velasquez that the ladies were walking about without hats.

"That is the fashion," the Spanish painter replied. "In Spain fashion follows the rules set by the Court, and the Court has extremely severe precepts. A royal decree regulates the size of collars for men. Ladies wear no hats; ladies-in-waiting not even a cloak or a coat. Do you see those high heels? That is a regulation, too."

"It must be very tiring to walk about all day on high heels."

"They don't. High heels are only for the street. If you look carefully you will see that people are wearing double shoes. Underneath there is a heelless or very low-heeled shoe. As you see, the streets are very dusty in Madrid, and in rainy weather the mud reaches to one's ankles. High heels protect against both dust and mud."

"Isn't it unhealthy to live here?"

"On the contrary, Madrid is the healthiest city in Spain. Do you see that row of houses? It is quite new. Much building has been going on recently. Some wits say that if a man goes to the country in the morning, he can't find his way back the same evening, because he can't recognize his own street. Everybody's building tall houses with balconies on every floor. This is the Puerta del Sol. It is called the Navel of Madrid. Madrid itself is called the Navel of Spain—and it is in the exact center of the country. The grandfather of our present King, Philip II, was very fond of mathematics, so he founded his capital here. The most interesting thing about our city is the great number of foreigners. There aren't nearly so many in Seville. . . ."

"Have you been abroad much?"

"Never. I have had no time. I was just twenty-four when I first came to Court. Well, here you can see Flemish, Dutch, Sicilians, Neapolitans, Milanese, American Redskins. Madrid is the tavern of the world—and a brand-new tavern at that. Architecture has no individuality here. In the whole of Madrid there is only one church with a decent façade; I'll show it to you when we reach it. Nor has the city any fortifications—the walls of the old city have been swallowed up by the large-scale building."

"Where is the promenade?"

"On the Calle Mayor about noon. In the evening the rich drive among the trees of the Prado while the commoners watch them. Well, here is the church I mentioned. It belongs to the Nuns of St. Jerome. . . . I find it very beautiful. . . . I often just stand and stare at it. . . ."

"It is nobly drawn," Pieter replied politely. "But I find Gothic alien to me. It is all angles and points. I prefer rounded curves."

"And I admire the Gothic."

When they returned to the Palace, the guard presented arms.

"That is for you," Velasquez said, "not for me."

"Well, I wasn't entitled to it myself in Brussels until I was made a nobleman."

"I could never become one under our court regulations. In the budget I rank under the same heading as the barbers. But I cannot complain. My salary is the same as a barber's, twelve reales a day, and every year ninety ducats for a suit of clothes. It is a fine salary: the bellows man has only two and a half reales a day."

"Who?"

"The *sollinador* or bellows man. It's a special job. In winter he has to walk through all the rooms and keep the fires going."

"And how many court painters are there?"

"Five. Father Maino, three Italians—who are not much good—and myself. The King is very kind to me and shows me a lot of favor."

"Do you see him sometimes?"

"Almost every day. He is greatly interested in painting and quite informal. He has a key to every single room in the palace. One day an Italian painter left some sausage in his drawer for supper; but, when he came home, he found only the half of it with a slip of paper: 'I ate the other half. The King.'"

"Does he talk much to you?"

"Oh yes, he is a most kindly man. You'll like him, too. Wouldn't you care to see the pictures now? There is no one about in most of the rooms at this time of day."

They went to the Mayordomo to ask his permission, which was readily granted. The King was out hunting, and they could visit his private apartments, which, Pieter discovered, contained no less than seventy-nine Titians, forty-three Tintoretos, twenty-nine Veroneses, and twenty-six Bassanios.

"Where am I to begin? It would take weeks to study all these. We had better draw up a plan and stick to it. We might perhaps do two rooms today, and then I should like to pay a visit to your studio."

"Gladly, but you will find me disappointing after Titian and Tintoretto. Let us begin with the big dining hall, shall we?"

There was a merry undertone in his voice. Pieter entered the huge room, and his first glance fell on the Three Magi, his own picture. The King had honored it by hanging it in a most important place. Strange. The very same King who had belittled him as a diplomat. . . .

"Interesting," he said, looking at the painting, "this is the second time I have met myself as a young painter. You cannot have that experience, being young yourself. You know, I usually work with a school of collaborators, doing as Raphael did; that is to say, I make an exact sketch in miniature, my men enlarge it, then I help in the final execution or leave them to it, reserving for myself only the final touches. Well, now I am going to do the same thing with this work of young Rubens."

"What do you want to change?" Velasquez asked with some anxiety.

"Its colors are too loud. I've stopped painting in that style. Have you ever heard of Van Dyck?"

"Yes, I have. Don Diego thinks him most talented."

"So he is. He is the same age as you. I mention him because he cannot understand how a man can bear to work on a painting done years earlier. What do you think?"

"I have never had occasion to face that problem," Velasquez replied after some hesitation. "My experience has been rather the other way about . . . though it's difficult to explain. . . . You see, I still have many doubts about myself. I have never been able to feel completely confident. . . . But I hope I am not boring you with all this?"

"No, it's extremely interesting: go on."

"I have always longed for a verdict on my work which I could accept as final. But I have never obtained it. Some people have praised me beyond measure; that has delighted but never convinced me. Sometimes these Italians have called me untalented, which hurt me, of course, but I hoped it wasn't true. Well, once I was rummaging in my father-in-law's studio and found a sketch. I didn't know whose it was; he has had many pupils, and any of them could have left it behind. I found it surprisingly good. I asked my father-in-law who this rare talent was? He laughed at me, for I had done the sketch myself some years earlier. This discovery filled me with great joy, since I knew that my judgment about others was to be trusted. By sheer accident I gave myself confidence."

Pieter gave another glance at the Three Magi, then they passed on. The next room contained Titians, all of them of breath-taking beauty. The two painters called each other's attention to points which only experts could appreciate. And Pieter observed not only Titian but Velasquez also. Each of his remarks was like the brilliant shot of a perfect marksman scoring a bull's-eye. Pieter had never met anyone in his life who was so well informed in his own profession.

"That is enough," he told Velasquez at last. "Now I should like to see your studio."

They found it empty, and on Pieter's inquiry Velasquez explained that he had no pupils at present. But there were plenty of pictures. Velasquez allowed his visitor ample time for the study of each painting. His works greatly excited Pieter, who felt at once that these were the creations of a great artist. He was especially struck by the portraits. This painter did not resemble anyone. He had some vague kinship with Tintoretto, but only a most rudimentary one. Every one of his pictures contained some element of puritanism: a negation of too easy methods, a refusal to make superficial effects. Some of the portraits had no background at all; the head stood out against neutral color. Pieter bent close to the canvas to observe the wizardry of the technique. Velasquez managed to give his faces incredible plasticity by a single transparent brown point or a single small line. He was able to present amazingly the transparency of the human skin.

"You must be in love with ears," Pieter said at last.

"I suppose I am."

"I am more interested in hands."

"I find them interesting, too, but not so much as ears. For me there are wicked ears and witty ones, naïve ears and whimsical ears, noble ears and mean ears. I think that the ear is a coat of arms which every human being carries on his own head."

After a little pause Pieter asked:

"Tell me—what is your aim in painting? I know you are a painter by profession, and paint pictures for money, as we all do. But I should like to know what is your private aim in painting a picture, besides pleasing the buyer. Perhaps I could put it this way: what is your artistic faith?"

"Truth," replied Velasquez, nodding solemnly. "Not reality, as my father-in-law maintains. I am little concerned with reality, but a great deal with truth. When I began work, I painted by instinct, but I soon discovered that I could not paint a lie."

"But what happens if you are forced to flatter?"

"I am never forced. Whoever comes to me knows that he will see the truth. Even the King. But he is a noble soul and wants the truth."

"You say you cannot paint a lie. But did Raphael lie when he painted the Sistine Madonna? Is the man who delights and consoles mankind with eternal beauty a liar?"

"I don't think my task is consolation. My task is to show man the truth, and only an artist can recognize truth. . . . My task is to search for and show to man a . . . sense of life's correlations, or rather to search, for one can never completely succeed. I think there is no painter in the world who can truly represent a human head."

"Strange. You would think, wouldn't you, that essentially there is only one art in the world, yet here we are, we two, with utterly different conceptions of the nature of art—although we are undoubtedly equally significant as artists."

"There is nothing surprising about that," remarked Velasquez. "You are a man from the north, I am a citizen of Seville. In your country the air is damp, the sun is not very strong, and colors and outlines are not sharply defined. You long for the southern sun, which for you is an unattainable ideal. We Spaniards, on the other hand, live in a land where the sun shines with merciless brilliance, leaving nothing to the imagination. You have ample opportunity to exercise your imagination; for me there is no such possibility. My task is to portray the truth—not reality—for they are by no means the same thing."

"You said you had difficulty in expressing yourself, but now you have become quite eloquent," Pieter smiled.

Velasquez blushed, but he also smiled.

"Tell me, has your career been a difficult one, have you had to struggle hard?"

"Not at all. My father, De Silva, belonged to the lesser nobility; but he had none of the prejudices of his kind and agreed at once when I said I wanted to be a painter. In Seville I lived frugally, but I never knew real want. Besides I was lucky enough to become a court painter at the age of twenty-four: I owe much to Count Olivarez, who also comes from Seville. He is a patron of the arts and himself a poet; but when he became a minister of state, he burned everything he had written."

"Indeed. This is most interesting. But tell me, is your real name Diego de Silva?"

"Oh you are merely confused by a Spanish custom. We can use the name of either parent as we please."

At that moment there was a loud knock on the door, and Cossiers rushed in.

"Master, I have been looking for you everywhere. The King wishes to see you immediately. You have ten minutes to dress in."

Pieter quickly took his leave of Velasquez and hastily got into the black court costume. He arrived in the antechamber quite out of breath, but the court clerk allowed him time to recover himself, at the same time warning him to drop on one knee in the King's presence.

At the sound of a bell Pieter entered the audience chamber and knelt. His Majesty gave him his hand to kiss and commanded him to rise.

"I like your pictures, Rubens. My aunt has already informed me how much they cost, and you will receive the money tomorrow."

"My most humble thanks, Your Majesty."

"Have you brought all the documents?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, including the authorization from Her Highness. I am awaiting Your Majesty's command to present them."

"Do not present them to me. I have already given orders that you are to supply a detailed report to the State Council, and you can present them on that occasion. You will be notified of the time in due course. How is Her Highness, my aunt?"

They discussed Isabella's ailments and Pieter's lodgings, and the King

told him that he wanted Pieter to paint an equestrian portrait of himself.

"I know your portrait of the Duke of Lerma. I think it excellent. Where did you paint it?"

"At Ventosilla twenty-five years ago, Your Majesty, when Your Majesty's father of glorious memory was also there."

"Indeed. I was not even in the world at that time. Now you have known two generations of our family on the throne."

"I hope I shall not know any more, Your Majesty."

"That was a good answer. Be ready to begin the painting tomorrow at nine."

On returning to his studio, Pieter at once took his sketchbook and set down on paper his impressions of the King. Philip IV was very like his father: a big-bodied man with broad shoulders, inclined to stoutness, while his full lower lip and prominent chin were also family characteristics. He struck Pieter as being not at all a warlike, bloodthirsty tyrant, but a simple, kindly man.

After luncheon came an audience with Don Diego, who, after his recent marriage, had received the title of Count Leganez. He greeted Pieter with evident pleasure, but immediately afterward exclaimed:

"Have you heard the news? The Duke of Buckingham has been murdered."

"What?" cried Pieter in high excitement.

"He was at Portsmouth, just setting out with the British fleet to relieve La Rochelle. Some Protestant fanatic killed him. We have no further information. But the details don't matter. The only question is: will Charles I continue Buckingham's policy? If he does, our negotiations can continue. The same courier brought the intelligence that Charles has already appointed an envoy extraordinary to the Court of Spain."

"Not so fast, Don Diego; give me time to recover from the shock. I remember the Duke well. I painted his portrait in Paris."

"Well, I'm not much concerned with the human aspect of the murder. When Buckingham came to Madrid wearing his famous suit, I found him an incredibly vain and wicked man. Olivarez loathed him, and you can imagine how happy he is today. Perhaps in his joy he will even make friends with England. But, as I said, the only important question now is how English home policy will develop. This year Buckingham's

enemies have compelled the King to sanction the Petition of Rights, and that has greatly strengthened Parliament. If, in spite of the King, Parliament goes on persecuting Catholics with the same tenacity, we shall be compelled to emphasize our demand for religious toleration in England. Buckingham would have complied with such a demand, but as yet we cannot say what Charles's attitude will be. Olivarez thinks that until the envoy extraordinary arrives about the twentieth of the month it is no use discussing anything with you, as he may bring a message that entirely alters the situation. All the same, I hope that you will be able to appear before the Junta. Has the King received you yet?"

"Yes, Your Excellency. I have brought His Majesty some pictures which he was gracious enough to accept. He received me today for a few minutes at noon."

"What was his manner to you?"

"His Majesty was extremely kind. Indeed he has commissioned me to paint an equestrian portrait of himself, which I am to begin tomorrow."

"Excellent. I am glad not only for your sake, but also in the interests of peace. If you win the King's confidence, which you especially should not find a difficult task, our progress will be all the smoother. It is certainly fortunate that you are an artist, for His Majesty is an amateur himself."

Don Diego politely inquired about his lodgings, gave him some interesting details about the palace and its treasures, and then asked:

"Have you met Velasquez?"

"He was the first man I spoke to. I have also seen some of his pictures."

"Well, and what is your opinion of his talent?"

"Don Diego, I am going to say something that may strike you as excessive. But this man is a genius, greater than anybody I have ever known."

"Greater even than Van Dyck?"

"Not very much greater, but in my opinion, yes, greater."

"Greater even than you?" Don Diego asked, a little teasingly.

Pieter remained serious and answered calmly:

"In certain respects he is even greater than I."

"Bravo, Rubens! Pacifists are often cowards—but you are a hero. I must tell you that I respect you greatly."

When Pieter left Don Diego, he returned once more to the great dining hall and studied his Three Magi dispassionately for a long time. And he decided that the man who had painted such a picture was an extremely talented artist, one of the greatest.

XI

The King arrived next morning on the stroke of nine, attired in a black hunting suit. Pieter had already prepared his huge canvas on the easel, and all was ready, even down to the iced water and lemon which Pieter had discovered to be the King's favorite drink.

"You can begin, Rubens. I mean to go riding this evening, and Velasquez will arrange for you to see me on horseback."

"Yes, Your Majesty, that is a good method. I followed it when I painted the Duke of Buckingham."

"Oh, so you knew that unfortunate man?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. The peace negotiations resulted from our acquaintance. And we had a business connection, too; he bought my collection of antiques."

"Had you such an important collection?"

"He paid a hundred thousand guilders for it, Your Majesty."

The King remained unmoved by this figure, being probably unable to judge whether it was much or little.

"I was not aware that Buckingham was so much interested in antiques. My impression of him during his visit to Madrid was of a rather empty creature, a man of the world who needed constant titillation by new pleasures and sensations. Nor did he care where he obtained these sensations. He presented me with a dwarf concealed in an enormous cake. I think he was more interested in the dwarf than in the siege of La Rochelle."

This remark somewhat astonished Pieter. The King was obviously an intelligent man, quite otherwise than he had imagined him.

"Your Majesty's opinion of him coincides exactly with my own. But I should like to believe that his death at least may prove of some use to mankind."

"How can anyone tell what is and what is not of use to mankind? We grope our way blindly through this world."

"War, Your Majesty, is certainly of no use to mankind."

"So we have come to politics. Tell me, Rubens, why do you want to meddle with politics when you follow such a fine profession?"

"For many reasons, Your Majesty. I love Flanders, my immediate fatherland, and I love Antwerp. I should like to spare them the horrors and misery of war. Then, again, I love mankind. I want men to be able to live comfortably, to marry and play happily with their children. But, if the roof is fired above their heads, if they have to fly before an enemy along winter-bound roads, if whole villages are smitten by the plague, if men rush madly at each other's throats, I am both grieved and revolted. And that is why I meddle with politics, Your Majesty. I am even bold enough to believe that if I had sufficient opportunity I could achieve something. I swear to Your Majesty that I am seeking no personal gains or favors; I desire only to be useful to my fellow men. I am wealthy as it is, according to my middle-class conceptions."

"Are you not perhaps something of a dreamer, my friend?"

"No, Your Majesty, I consider myself a sober enough fellow. It is true that in my youth I dreamed of world peace, but I awoke from that dream long ago. My only aim now is to lighten man's burden of pain, misery, and poverty where I can."

"What you describe is my task rather than yours. God has seen fit to put heavy responsibilities on my shoulders. Do you think I want men to die needlessly? Once while hunting I shot a beater, and I was overcome with remorse; I would have given anything to bring that man back to life. It was in vain that the Church absolved me; I shall never forgive myself. I am a humane man, Rubens. Of course, you imagine that this implies my desiring to make peace at once with everybody, but that's where my troubles begin. Why do you think I am a king? By God's grace, by His judgment. He placed me where I am to defend His country. I am not bigoted, but one day I shall have to render an account of myself to God, and then how shall I answer for Holland? And, when God asks whether I have done everything in my power to ensure that no foreign gods are adored in England, what must I answer then? I have an immense heritage and an immense responsibility. Many thousands of Dutch, of Danish, of various Europeans, have died, but unlike the beater who died innocently. They were in revolt against the Church of God, and on themselves lies the guilt of their own deaths."

"Your Majesty, England, Holland, and Denmark will never again be Catholic countries."

"If they did again become Catholic, it could only be at the cost of terrible bloodshed. The prelates must be mistaken; God cannot desire that. Nor am I stubbornly resolved to set my face against England. The well-being of the Catholics of the Spanish Empire is doubtless more important to God than any attempt to convert other peoples, to the ruin of Spanish Catholics. But the case of Holland is different. God has ordained that country to be under the suzerainty of the Spanish crown. Must I, the grandson of Philip II and the son of Philip III, allow Holland, one of the richest regions of our Empire, to break away from Spain and ruin us by her commercial rivalry? Politics are not child's play, Rubens."

"Certainly not, Your Majesty. But, when the toe of a wounded soldier is turning gangrenous, it is better to cut off his foot rather than wait until his leg has to come off. A Spanish Empire that had not to maintain at enormous cost an army in Holland would be much stronger than one impoverished by constant warfare."

"So I should give up Holland, should I, part of my father's heritage?"

"You can preserve your rights, Your Majesty. And, if the States General refuse to make peace unless the independence of Holland is granted, there is still England to be considered."

"Spinola is of the same opinion, Count Leganez, too. Olivarez, on the other hand, paints quite a different picture. . . . Well, let me see how far you have got with the portrait."

After inspecting the sketch the King expressed his approval and promised to continue next day both the sitting and their discussion.

Pieter knew that he had established himself in the King's favor. Had Philip confined the talk to painting, it would have been a bad sign. But now he knew that he could proceed with his mission. He saw Philip as a well-educated, clever, good-hearted young man, but lacking in the first quality a king should possess: willingness to bear responsibility.

Philip now came every day, and the sittings grew longer. Pieter tried to talk of other things besides politics. He discovered that the King was a lover of the theater; he not only delighted in the company of playwrights, he was himself a keen actor. He had no greater pleasure than to give amateur performances in the Queen's apartments before an exclusive

court audience. Pieter spoke of the theater of the late Duke of Mantua. The King listened with great interest, asking many questions, particularly about the actresses. At last he shook his head.

"That is not the kind of theater I care for. In Spain today there is no stronger force than our newly revived nationalism. We are interested only in contemporary Spanish life; hence our plays have an essentially modern background. We have a most talented man to write such plays, De Vega."

"Of course, Your Majesty. Every Madrileño who comes to Brussels mentions him. I know, too, that he was once secretary to the Duke of Lerma, but at the time I visited the Duke he had already relinquished that office."

"Oh, yes, that is Lope de Vega. One need only mention a subject to him and within four days he will produce the finished play. He has written almost fifteen hundred comedies. And do not imagine that these pieces are merely sketches of the *comedia dell arte* type. His actors are given a complete text which must be learned by heart. You must see one of our performances. And you may also read him, for he has written much quite apart from the theater; for example, a very fine work about the expulsion of the Moriscos called *La Corona Tragica*. It contains wonderful passages; I can recite many pages of it."

"I shall try to read it, Your Majesty. The expulsion of the Moriscos has been much discussed outside Spain."

"I know, I know. Many crocodile tears have been shed over the fate of the poor, persecuted Moriscos by sensitive persons who have quite forgotten that the Moriscos invaded this country and only after much suffering and bloodshed were overcome. The expulsion was a last gesture of contempt made by a highly patriotic people. . . . But to return to the theater, don't assume that De Vega is our only talent. We have a new writer called Calderon whom I discovered myself. He also writes morality plays, one of which I see on every Corpus Christi day. I tell you all this to let you understand that Spain today is experiencing a national rebirth that permeates her entire life. I know that you in Flanders are not overfond of the theater. We Spaniards are closer heirs of classical Rome than the Italian states. People want bullfights or comedies as well as bread. I know that politicians sneer at what they term my absurd love for the theater. But the Church provides a pulpit from which the faithful can hear their faith expounded, and the stage is also a pulpit from which

Spaniards can be proud to hear their national faith declared. While you are in Madrid, you will slowly begin to understand that this new national consciousness makes it more difficult for us to sign peace with our enemies. It is not easy to appreciate this from Brussels, and even Her Highness, my aunt, finds it difficult to put herself in our place."

"Your Majesty's power is absolute."

"Yes, absolute. I am the master of life and death. I bear many responsibilities, but the greatest is what I owe to myself."

"Your Majesty, if you put a stop to war, there will be more money for the theater and more money with which to give commissions to promising Spanish painters."

"Ah, ha, I see you have already discovered my weakness. My advisers constantly have recourse to this argument. Olivarez, however, develops the theme in a different way. He says that the more powerful the Empire becomes the more money there will be to patronize and encourage the arts."

"Your Majesty, I have a small farm near the Flemish village of Eeckeren, and there I have a peasant neighbor. He wanted to buy a fine chest but was too mean to spend the money. So he trumped up a charge against his father-in-law over some inheritance, with the idea of buying the chest on the proceeds. But he lost the lawsuit, got into debt, and has not only given up all hope of buying the chest but lives in fear of his creditors taking his farm away from him."

The King laughed, obviously delighted by the anecdote.

"That's the kind of argument I like, Rubens. An example like that has more effect than hours of Olivarez's tedious homilies."

A few days later they had a long and interesting talk about hunting which began by the King asking Pieter whether he was fond of the chase.

"I think hunting a most important institution, Your Majesty, for it helps to prevent war."

"What do you mean? What can the one have to do with the other?"

"Human beings still harbor the instinct to kill, Your Majesty. The hunt provides an outlet for this instinct like a newly dug drain for an inconvenient pool. The huntsman has his 'kill and purges himself of his passion. It is therefore good that princes should hunt."

"You bring out strange thoughts, Rubens. That idea has never occurred to me during either a hunt or a bullfight."

"Does Your Majesty attend bullfights?"

"Of course. You must see one yourself. Bullfighting is a form of sport which has strong traditions here and is assiduously followed by all young noblemen. I learned it myself in my boyhood and became quite expert. And yet if one is clumsy one stands a good chance of being killed. If that happens, the ladies scream and faint."

"Then ladies also attend such spectacles?"

"Of course. We usually arrange bullfights to entertain any distinguished feminine visitor from abroad. Ladies also take part in boar hunts, well protected in their carriages. No harm can come to them, and they enjoy themselves thoroughly. These are typically Spanish customs, Rubens. A foreigner can never understand us."

"But an Englishman might argue, Your Majesty, that he lives in such a peculiar way on his island that no foreigner can ever understand him. Yet that is hardly an adequate reason for nations fighting each other. Male human nature differs deeply enough from the female and yet there are marriages in the world."

"Yes, there are marriages . . ." the King echoed, somewhat absent-mindedly.

Pieter was not surprised at this pensive mood. As the days passed and he became acquainted with the gentlemen of the immediate royal entourage, he had grown well informed about the intimate details of palace life. The King was not happily married. The royal union had begun with scandals, like that concerning Count Villamediana, and bore unavoidable traces of these painful disturbances. Nor was it the Queen's fault alone—Philip IV was not suited to be a husband. It was openly said that insatiable sensuality and love of adventure drove him into the arms of a succession of paramours, none of whom were ladies of the aristocracy. This extremely kind and affable King had inherited few traits from his grandfather, Philip II—but he had certainly inherited a deeply rooted arrogance of soul. He would not sleep with a Duchess because she might feel herself his equal. Commoners, on the other hand, looked up to him as to a Zeus who had graciously descended to them from Olympus. Thus the young King swung like a pendulum between the extremes of his talents, artistic leanings, sense of political duty, sensuality, awareness of responsibility and pride.

The presence of the Antwerp painter intrigued the Madrid diplomats

and roused their suspicions. In the first week two foreign representatives—the Papal Nuncio and the Venetian Ambassador—asked for permission to visit his studio. Both of them politely praised the portrait of the King and then began to talk, making Pieter chuckle to himself at their apparently innocent questions, the replies to which were hardly calculated to assist tactful inquisition.

The equestrian portrait was finished in a week. In the same space of time Pieter completely won the King's favor. Philip told him frankly that he had grown very fond of him and that he thought highly of his political views. But he had shown no personal interest as yet in the documents concerning the past negotiations. When Pieter placed the huge pile of papers in front of him, he rummaged among them absent-mindedly, saying that it would be better if the State Council were first to digest such an immense quantity of material. He would then receive a report by Olivarez on the essence of the matter; Spinola's opinion he had heard often enough already. In any case, the English envoy extraordinary was coming, and everything depended on the dispatches he was bringing.

Pieter had arrived on the thirteenth of August; the Englishman came on the twentieth. Next evening Spinola sent for Pieter, who had not yet met the Marquis in Madrid. Don Diego was also present. After greeting Pieter in the friendliest manner possible, Spinola came to the point:

"I have good news for you; I have discovered the gist of the English dispatches. King Charles is remaining faithful to all that the Duke of Buckingham proposed; it is his dear wish that the agreement drawn up by Gerbier and yourself should now be considered by the governments of the two countries. But there is other news, too; the British fleet has appeared off La Rochelle to end the siege and save the Huguenots. Now, Olivarez would like to implement the treaty with the French and send ships; but, as we are expecting a huge consignment of silver from Cuba, we need all our men-of-war to escort it."

"Is there any news about the progress the British fleet is making?"

"They have made no progress. The French shore batteries are very good, and the English have been unable to land. I hope that the Junta will meet soon—then you will have to summon all your wits and prove your mettle."

After discussing the material once more, Pieter returned to the palace and waited for the call. But it did not come next day. The King, however,

appeared in the studio with his sister, the Infanta Maria, and one of her ladies-in-waiting.

"You are to paint Her Highness," he told Pieter, who kissed the Infanta's hand on bended knee and bowed deeply to the lady-in-waiting. "I want to look on while you work."

No one could call the Infanta beautiful. She was sallow and had a peevish, sharp nose inherited from her mother, to which was added her father's heavy lower lip. But Pieter was not Velasquez: he did not care so much for truth, especially now when he needed the King's favor for a very great cause.

"Do it carefully," the King said. "The picture will stay here, but life may carry Her Highness far away from us."

"It is a great distinction for me, Your Majesty, if in the coming years my humble work is to remind the King of Spain of his beloved sister."

Indeed it was said at Court that the King was greatly attached to his sisters and was more intimate with them than with the Queen. The Infanta Maria, who now sat for Pieter in a ceremonial gown and a triple ruff, was engaged to Archduke Ferdinand, son of the Emperor and King of Hungary, who had been crowned while his father was still alive, to keep his throne secure. Soon she would leave Spain to become Queen of Hungary, and later she would be Empress of the Holy Roman Empire. While he sketched her, Pieter tried to perceive what was attractive in her, and at last decided that her hands were her saving grace, for they were extremely shapely and expressive. He therefore tried to give her hands their true significance in his sketch.

"What news of your affairs?" the King asked.

"I am waiting the Junta's summons with great eagerness, Your Majesty. Perhaps it will come tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? I see that you don't know Olivarez. You must be prepared to wait for a week."

"Does the same delay occur also in urgent matters, Your Majesty?"

"Only in urgent matters. At first I found it difficult to resign myself to these delays, but I must confess that, generally speaking, events have justified Olivarez in taking his time. Any matter which he holds in abeyance usually turns out to his advantage in the end—sometimes indeed an infinitely postponed affair solves itself."

"But my appearance before the Junta will be quite informal, Your Majesty, and Her Highness has urged me to be as quick as possible."

"So you do not realize the value of apparently wasted time? Really, Rubens, I expected more perspicacity of you. Olivarez is waiting for the outcome of the siege of La Rochelle. The mood of the Junta will depend on the success or failure of the British fleet."

It was to be a failure. The British fleet returned to England without relieving La Rochelle. Richelieu had triumphed once more. Pieter was informed that the Junta would meet on the twenty-eighth of the month and hear a statement from him; Count Olivarez would receive him beforehand.

The face of Count Olivarez, the "*Conde Duque*," was all jaw. It betokened immense will power, and the high forehead indicated that this will power was directed by a mind of considerable intelligence. In manner the Andalusian nobleman was haughty toward everyone—except the King, to whom he deferred as a slave to a master. His career had already been described to Pieter. He had been made a Chamberlain to the Prince of the Asturias by the Duke of Lerma during the reign of Philip III. He married the extremely ugly daughter of Zuniga, the Viceroy of Peru. And by the time the Prince became King his career was already assured, for Zuniga had been made Prime Minister. It did not take Olivarez long to supplant his father-in-law. He then began work in earnest. He slept little—rising an hour before sunrise—and gave up all social life. He made himself absolutely indispensable to Philip IV. Every morning he knelt to make his report by the royal bedside—even if the recital took two hours. Everybody hated him, but the King would listen to no word against him. And indeed it was difficult to bring concrete charges against him, for in financial matters he was transparently honest. He had studied for the priesthood in his early youth, and a certain somewhat superstitious mysticism had remained in his soul. He lodged in the royal palace, and it was said that he kept a bier in his chamber on which he lay while saying his prayers.

"There was absolutely no need for me to see you, and that is why I did not send for you earlier," he said to Pieter rudely.

"I did not apply for an audience, Your Grace, because your time belongs to the King and Spain and no one has the right to usurp it."

"Of course, and I hope you will remember that when you appear before the Junta."

"I am a mere representative, Your Grace, the representative of Her Highness. I will say as much as would Her Highness herself and in the full knowledge that your time is limited."

"So you are the famous Rubens," remarked Olivarez, giving him a searching glance. "Tell me, why do you meddle in politics?"

"That is a question Her Highness and the Duke of Buckingham can best answer, Your Grace, for it is they who have insisted on making use of my humble person as an intermediary."

"Well, I shall soon discover your abilities. . . . If there is anything you require during your visit, let me know. I prefer petitions to be in writing."

"I am infinitely grateful to Your Grace, but I require nothing save your good will."

The Duke laughed, yet his laughter was not an expression of mirth but rather of sardonic ill humor.

"That is not given freely," he said. "It must be deserved. Now wait outside until we call you."

Pieter waited long before he was summoned to enter a large room in which the Junta was in session. Olivarez was presiding. Around the council table sat several dignitaries Pieter did not know but also some of his acquaintances, including Spinola and Count Leganez. Pieter was requested to take a seat at the foot of the table, and he noticed that some of the gentlemen seemed rather apprehensive when they saw the large pile of documents he carried. Olivarez introduced him and in a few words indicated the general nature of his report. Pieter drew up his chair and began to speak:

"Your Excellencies, I was in Paris when Charles I, the King of England, married the sister of Louis XIII, the King of France. On this occasion I made the acquaintance of the Duke of Buckingham, who subsequently sent to me Gerbier, his secretary. I painted a portrait of the Duke and while this was being done we discussed political matters."

And so on. . . . Pieter told his story in considerable detail until he came to Gerbier's first letter, which he read. Olivarez then interposed:

"We do not wish to hear every letter *in extenso*, only as much of each letter as is directly relevant."

"That will not be difficult, Your Grace, as I have marked the relevant

passages. . . . To proceed, after dutifully reporting to Her Highness I replied to this letter that. . . .”

After a few moments Olivarez again interrupted him.

“Keep your explanatory passages as short as possible. We have little time to spare.”

“Of course we have time,” said Spinola quickly. “We are sitting here expressly to hear this statement. It is important that our colleagues should hear all the details, otherwise it will be impossible for them to understand the matter as completely as is necessary.”

“The noble Marquis,” Olivarez remarked with a sneer, “underestimates the intelligence of this body. We are capable of understanding much from a few words.”

“But more from more words,” put in Don Diego at once, “and from a full account one can understand everything.”

“Time is passing, gentlemen,” retorted Olivarez in a slightly raised voice, “let us go on.”

Pieter continued. The next interruption came when he mentioned Scaglia. The members of the Junta began to ask why Olivarez had had the Abbé expelled from Brussels. The Duke evidently found this question inconvenient and shouted the members down. The argument developed into one on finance; Olivarez became even more furious and beat his fist on the table. After this excitement had died down, Pieter’s report became more interesting, although he glossed over some of the more delicate features of the correspondence. When he was reading one of his own letters, someone called out:

“Oh, excellent, most excellently put.”

Everyone was now listening to him most attentively. He described in vivacious fashion the unexpected appearance of the Danish Ambassador in his studio and his own journey to Holland. Finally he told how he came to be sent on this mission to Madrid. His report had taken two hours and fifteen minutes. Olivarez was fidgeting, but one of the members of the Junta asked for additional information. Soon a lively argument started, and Pieter became aware that under the guise of an explanation, he was making a speech on the necessity of securing peace. He was listened to with increasing respect, while Olivarez grew more and more impatient. At last Don Diego said:

"Now we know enough. There is no more need for argument: the facts are clear."

Several people agreed, but Olivarez again thumped the table.

"We must argue, and I can tell you now that it won't be a short argument. And I can also tell you that it won't be you gentlemen who will decide, but the King. Thank you, Rubens, you may now leave Madrid."

"Of course he mustn't leave," Spinola cried. "In the first place he has to paint several members of the royal family; secondly, I may need some information from him about questions which may arise in the future."

Pieter rose and made a profound bow toward the members of the Junta. One member, however, rose and shook his hand, and the rest followed his example. Only Olivarez neither left his seat nor looked up. But Pieter reserved his deepest bow for him. Don Diego told him later that the real storm started only after he had left the council chamber.

"A strange thing happened," he said. "Olivarez expressed a good opinion of you."

"Of me. I can believe that only with difficulty."

"And yet it is so. During the argument I asked him whether he had any objection to your report, as he was opposing its conclusions so strongly. He said, 'I have no objection to the report as such—your Rubens is a talented and agreeable man—I only object to the conclusions you draw from it.' You may look upon this as a great personal success. You have won Olivarez's esteem, and few people succeed in doing so. I advise you to cultivate this esteem, if for no other reason than to further our cause. When he likes a man, his affection is violently partisan, and so is his hatred. For instance, he hated the Duke of Buckingham excessively."

"And what is his attitude toward Richelieu?"

"A very strange one: he adores and hates him at the same time."

"Tell me, Don Diego, how good a politician is Olivarez?"

"Mediocre. He almost always spoils his best moves by committing stupid blunders. And, when trouble comes in consequence and he realizes that things have gone wrong, he breaks down and cries like a child. But I am afraid there is policy behind these outbursts, for he knows the King will take pity on him and protect him from his enemies."

"It may sound strange to you, Don Diego, but I believe the King to be a more talented man than Olivarez."

"The comparison has never occurred to me," Leganez replied after a pause for reflection, "but I dare say you are right."

"Then why doesn't he govern the Empire himself like Charles of England?"

"He has a failing, of which I think you must be aware: he is afraid of responsibility. As things are, Spain will have to pay the price for being governed by an honest but mediocre man. And nothing can be done to alter the situation. Undoubtedly, Olivarez is universally hated; indeed he appears to take delight in his unpopularity."

"And what is the immediate future of our cause?"

"The Junta will discuss the details in innumerable meetings. Olivarez will do everything to delay a decision. You will have to stay on in Madrid, and you will be here for months."

"That is unimportant, provided results are achieved. I am only sorry that I shall have to postpone my visit to Italy, which I have been looking forward to for some time."

"But there is no need to miss that. In the spring the Infanta Maria is traveling to meet her betrothed, the King of Hungary. Ask to be included in her retinue as far as Italy."

Pieter suggested this next day to the Infanta during the sitting. She was obviously delighted at the idea of having such a famous man in her retinue. When the King looked in to see how the portrait was progressing, she mentioned it to him on the spot.

"Certainly," the King replied at once. "But of course you must paint the first meeting of my sister and the King of Hungary."

This arrangement suited Pieter admirably, and he prepared to settle down in Madrid for the next few months. When the Infanta's portrait was finished, he set to work on that of Don Carlos. He was two years younger than his brother, the King, but the resemblance between the two was striking; indeed, if he had stepped into the royal shoes, few people would have noticed the difference. Pieter's practiced eye, however, detected the more rounded chin, the smaller eyes. Don Carlos was content to live humbly in his brother's shadow. He followed him everywhere and listened to his every word with the obsequiousness of a lackey.

Pieter was a constant witness of Carlos's dependence on the King. Whenever Philip left the studio, usually to visit Velasquez, it was almost impossible to get a word out of Don Carlos. And, if by chance he did

speak, he betrayed a great lack of culture and education. He had grown up almost unnoticed at the side of his talented elder brother. Pieter could not rid himself of the fancy that the shade of his uncle, the Don Carlos who had died in such mysterious circumstances, continually haunted the young man. It was rumored that Olivarez was unwilling to allow him to marry, lest some foreign princess with a stronger will than the Prince's should arrive at Court and upset all plans. For Pieter it was an oddly depressing task to paint this caricature of the King, whose only saving grace was that he resembled Charles V.

He next painted the King's youngest brother, Ferdinand, who was destined for an ecclesiastical career, and indeed had been made a cardinal while still a child. But there was nothing of the prelate about him; lessons bored him, he disliked reading, he was not interested in the arts. Besides being uneducated, he was sly in manner. Though his features superficially resembled those of the King, they betrayed a love of the sensual rather than the spiritual.

In traversing the palace corridors Pieter had several times encountered a woman, a tall, slender-waisted, dark-eyed beauty, and every time they met her black eyes flashed a glance at him. One day while Pieter and Velasquez were walking together she passed them. The Spaniard greeted her, and she returned his greeting with an eye on Pieter all the time.

"Who is she?" Pieter asked.

"The sister of a secretary in the fiscal department. She is a widow. Why do you ask?"

"For no special reason. I just wondered."

"As a matter of fact, she asked me the other day who you were and requested me to present you to her. I am afraid I forgot to do so just now. Forgive me, but I was preoccupied."

Another opportunity soon came, however, and after the introduction Pieter and the woman went for a stroll in the Prado. She told him that her husband, a merchant, had died two years ago, leaving her childless. Now she was living with her brother.

"Are you married, *señor*?" she asked. And then a little shyly, "I hope you don't take my question amiss."

"My wife is dead, *señora*, but she left me two fine sons from whom I have just received a letter."

"You should be happy. I am quite alone; there is no one to whom I am important."

At sunset the streets began to fill with people. There was a lovely warmth and quiet in the October evening. They turned along a narrow path, walking until they found an empty bench to sit on. She stared at the rising moon.

"What is your Christian name, *señora*?"

"Dolores. . . . Tell me, *señor*, are you not an ambassador as well as a painter?"

"Not exactly an ambassador, but something like one."

"And a Chamberlain?"

"Yes, a Chamberlain."

"I am deeply honored that as a poor commoner's wife I am allowed to sit in your company."

Pieter gave her a sidelong glance and saw that she was his for the taking. He took her into his arms, and she responded almost eagerly. After a long embrace she murmured: "You are so intriguing, so fair-haired and alien. . . ."

XII

Gevaert, the historian, an old friend of Pieter's who specialized in the study of Aurelius, the Roman Emperor, wrote to ask if there were any books in Spain on his subject. Pieter mentioned the matter to the King, and His Majesty told him that he had read of a manuscript relating to this period in the library of the Escorial. Pieter therefore decided to visit that immense palace in the company of Velasquez. As they approached the mountain on whose side it was built, the Spaniard said:

"When the cathedral of Seville was being planned, one of the priests said: 'Let us build such a church that the world will think us mad for having built it.' I often think the Escorial must have been planned on the same argument. Philip II was a sharp-witted man, but fate gave his brain an abnormal twist. Look at this mass of stone built into the bare mountainside, far from any town or village. It must have been conceived by a great but distorted mind. Just imagine that sallow, black-bearded, limping man, the master of half the world, tucked away in the heart of that mountain of stone in his tiny puritan bedroom, the door of which opened on to the gallery of the immense church, or in the dark crypt only a few feet away from a rose garden where he loved to spend much of his time."

"Yes, it had much the same effect on me when I visited the place twenty-five years ago. Tell me, what are those grim mountains over there?"

"That one is Mount St. Juan. If you like, we can climb it, but the horses will find it hard going. Near the summit you will find a small church with a hermit living near by. The other one is the Sierra Tocado, on which the King has a hunting lodge. Isn't it a wonderful country?"

"Wonderful, but it's alien to me. I admire it, but my heart belongs to the gentle countryside of Flanders. This landscape is silent and grim. . . . Have we time to stop here?"

"Yes, if you want to make a sketch. I could draw it with my eyes closed."

They dismounted, and Pieter made his sketch, noting down the colors carefully. Then they rode on. In the Escorial they inspected the pictures in the church and visited the library. The monk in charge, however, knew nothing of the Aurelian manuscript. They then climbed Mount St. Juan, right up to the church with the tall cross on it which was visible from Madrid. Here they sat down to rest and enjoy the wonderful panorama spread out beneath them.

"You see," remarked Velasquez, "here I feel at home. This landscape is my world."

"But not mine. I feel at home only in a happy landscape. I must feel that the whole countryside says 'Life is good.'"

"And I must feel that the landscape says 'Life is tragic.'"

"Haven't we just described the difference between my art and yours?" Pieter asked.

"Yes, I was thinking exactly the same myself."

"And we are probably the two best painters in Europe."

"You, certainly," replied Velasquez. "But I don't dare to say that of myself—not yet."

There was a pause. Then Pieter shivered a little. He suddenly felt that this was a rare moment, greater than the meeting of two kings. Then they remounted and rode gingerly down the steep path.

When Pieter reached the palace again, he was met with news of disaster. Pieter Heyn, the Dutch admiral, had surrounded and captured the whole Spanish American fleet near Cuba. The ships had surrendered without giving battle. Heyn had put the Spanish seamen ashore and manned the vessels with his own crews. Strangely enough this dreadful news caused elation rather than depression in the palace. So greatly was Olivarez detested that men saw this event not as a disaster for Spain but as a crushing blow to the personal prestige of the minister.

"It is a great humiliation for him," remarked Spinola. "So great that it may even cause his downfall. The real problem, however, is how we are to pay our armies now that our supply of gold from America is uncertain. I am sorry for the poor Archduchess, who has just written to me."

"Has Her Highness sent me any message?"

"Nothing for you this time, but she is insisting that I must return to Brussels. But I cannot go; I must wait here until peace is made possible whatever happens. . . . I am sorry to have to tell you, Rubens, that your

visit to Italy will have to be canceled. The Infanta's betrothal will take place here in Madrid some time in April; she will not be leaving Spain for the time being. Why are you making such a sour face?"

"Everything I hear, Your Excellency, is depressing. I had been looking forward to this Italian visit with great delight; then again the loss of the fleet is a source of great anxiety—the power of Spain has been seriously weakened. And look how the French Ambassador has been beaming since La Rochelle surrendered; Richelieu will outwit us yet."

"No need to worry at the moment. Although the defeat at Cuba is undoubtedly a serious blow, it will have at any rate one good result: Olivarez will become more reasonable. So just carry on quietly with your painting and wait. . . . Who are you painting now?"

"Tomorrow I begin on the Queen's portrait."

There was no need to improve on nature in this portrait, for the Queen was a beautiful woman. The daughter of Henry IV and Maria Medici, was also possessed of a piquant French charm, though her receding chin made her face rather doll-like, and her lovely lips were a little sullen. Pieter saw her at close quarters for the first time as she entered his studio accompanied by two ladies-in-waiting.

"I have already painted Your Majesty when you were a child," said Pieter.

"You painted me? When?"

"In the series of paintings I did for Her Majesty the Queen Mother in France I depicted allegorically the exchange of the two princesses: Your Majesty going from France to Spain and Her Majesty Queen Anne leaving Madrid for Paris."

"I hope you made me look pretty."

"Alas, I see that I failed to do justice to Your Majesty, but I shall do better this time."

"Have you seen my mother often? Did you visit the King of France? Do tell me about the French Court."

Pieter talked, yet not for more than a few minutes on any one subject, for the young Queen constantly interrupted with new questions. But he quickly adapted himself to the situation, contenting himself with short remarks, usually of a gay nature; and when he saw that the girl did not resent his somewhat informal manner he risked repeating one or two saucy Paris jokes. In this way he discovered that the young Queen of

Spain was living in Madrid in much the same mood as the young Queen of France in Paris; like a restless bird in an alien cage. But Queen Elizabeth was a much gayer little bird than Queen Anne. She was also rather coquettish, and Pieter did not doubt that Count Villamediana would not have adored her so distractedly had he not received more than a little encouragement. Pieter had seen enough of both Philip and Elizabeth to realize what royal marriages were like—and he thought wistfully of Bella and the years of happiness they had spent together. His thoughts were often with his children, too, of whom he regularly received news. They were always asking when their father was coming home.

But, when the next letter came from Antwerp, Pieter was lying in bed with a high fever. He had somehow caught a chill, and gout had once more attacked him. He lay in the room next to the studio, sweating and gnashing his teeth in pain. Dolores sat at his bedside, and Velasquez often visited him, but he found even these kindly attentions burdensome. He hated his illness, and he hated himself. And this attack did not pass as quickly as the former one, nor were repeated bleedings of any avail. It was a long time before he was on his feet again, thin, pale and unsteady.

Letters were now dated 1629, and the early days of January gave some promise that the new year would prove better than the old. Welcome events came tumbling over one another. The Abbé Seaglia arrived unexpectedly as the envoy extraordinary of the Duke of Savoy. Pieter could never understand what had been the objection to this man when he was in Brussels. But now the King, who would not hear of his participation in negotiations at that time, received him in a most friendly manner.

At the first occasion on which they were alone Pieter and Scaglia discussed politics.

"I really had no hope of seeing you here, *signor*. What news have you brought from Savoy?"

"Very little indeed. My master has sent me at my own request—but I am still in the service of England. King Charles has asked me to come to Madrid to assist you."

"The King of England named *me* specifically?"

"Yes. He considers this peace a legacy of Buckingham's, but he has dropped Gerbier, who lost his job when his master was murdered. In this room you represent Spain and I represent England. I have no doubt that we two can come to an agreement. Let us hope that the official die-hard

diplomats who have to formulate our conclusions will not wreck our efforts."

"What will be your first step?"

"To deliver King Charles's message to Olivarez. He is willing to sign a peace agreement after the subsidiary details have been clarified. He wishes to send a professional diplomat to Madrid and wants King Philip to send someone to London. Others will sign the treaty, but it will be our work. The Englishman has already arrived—his name is Sir Endymion Porter."

"But what will you propose to Olivarez first?"

"A discussion of outstanding details with me before Sir Endymion arrives 'officially.' For of course he has not yet done so even if he is here in person."

"That won't get you on very far, *signor*," Pieter said after a few moments' reflection. "I have rendered a detailed report to Olivarez about our past work; he knows the essentials, but he cannot possibly be aware of the details after hearing them just once."

"Well, what would you advise then?"

"Ask Olivarez to let me be present when you examine the details. Let us say—as his temporary secretary."

"Excellent. Then we can both work on him. Shall we go over the material now to refresh our memories?"

They had an hour's discussion, and then the Abbé left. The same day Olivarez sent for Pieter.

"You must help me, my friend," the Duke said. "An old acquaintance of yours, the Abbé Scaglia, has arrived, and I must discuss various details with him. I can't remember them all unaided. You must be my memory."

"Your Grace, I feel that this is the greatest honor I have ever received in my capacity as a diplomat. Richelieu's secretary cannot be as proud as I am."

"All right, all right, don't flatter me all the time," said Olivarez, with a pleased smile. "Listen, do you know who Richard Weston and Cottington are?"

"Oh yes. Weston is the English Chancellor of the Exchequer, Cottington the First Secretary of the Privy Council."

"You seem to know your lesson well. These two are working for peace in London. Weston wrote to Coloma in Brussels—he deputizes for Spinola

Albrecht bowed with impeccable suavity, kissed Isabella's hand, and withdrew.

"You have a very fine son, Rubens. I shall be happy to have him at my Court."

"Your Highness, I should like to ask humbly that he may be allowed to prepare for his career, working by permission in the office of the State Council—without any salary for the time being. He is coming to Brussels in any case for his studies."

"There will be no difficulty about that. Let him report at the Chancellory. What news about yourself, Rubens?"

"I am going to be married, Your Highness. It is a daring resolve, as my bride is but sixteen. But I have examined my soul, Your Highness, and cannot do otherwise. Twenty-one years ago I announced my first marriage in this very room—and my happiness was perfect. I hope my second will prove as happy."

"You know what you are doing," Isabella replied, "I can only wish you joy. I remember that we gave you a commission as a wedding present when you married first. This time I shall do the same. My late husband founded the Order of St. Ildefonso when he was Governor of Portugal. He loved his creation so much that when we came to Brussels he dedicated the court chapel to this Order. More than thirty years have passed since then, but the chapel is still without a decent altar. Now I am having a marble one erected, and I want you to paint a fine altarpiece, a triptych. The main picture should show the Miracle of the Chasuble, the wings my husband and myself with our patron saints. And you can start at once as I wish to have the chapel ready very soon."

"I am most grateful, Your Highness. May I ask the political news?"

"Something that will certainly interest you: your Mantua has ceased to exist—literally. Richelieu himself took over the command of the northern French Army, and the Emperor was forced to take drastic countermeasures. Mantua was burned, pillaged, and laid waste. The report said that there had never been such devastation since the sack of Rome a hundred years ago. The Pope, I am sure, will be very angry and may join Richelieu. Perhaps he will even turn to Gustavus Adolphus, of whom I hear that he has landed in Usedom."

"Most likely, Your Highness. This war is quite impossible as it is. There is supposed to be a Catholic and a Protestant side; but gradually

there will be only Protestant powers on the Catholic side and Catholic states on the Protestant. . . .”

When he took his leave, the Archduchess asked:

“Rubens, have you thought carefully about your remarriage?”

“Your Highness, I am a pious and moral man. Wedlock is the only state for me, and I cannot live without that girl.”

“You can’t because you won’t; but, if you are in love, there’s no use arguing with you. Marry her and be happy.”

“Albrecht,” said Pieter on the way home, “I have something serious to tell you. I want to get married, my boy, and I have chosen Helen Fourment to be my new wife. And in connection with this I must add that I have arranged with Her Highness for you to be given employment in the Chancery. I am very glad, since it’s a great honor for you, and in any case you would have had to come to Brussels to study law.”

“Father,” said the boy, startled. “I shouldn’t think of disobeying you, but I humbly beg you not to send me out of your sight. I am happy only when I am with you. Let me stay at home; I can study law in Antwerp just as well.”

“But my marriage is bound to be a shock to you, my boy. I know that you and Helen don’t get on very well together. It would be better for you not to be at home until things have settled down. Although I, too, shall miss you greatly.”

“Father, don’t send me away. I promise to be kind and obedient to Helen. I won’t do anything to displease you. But please, don’t send me away.”

Pieter looked at his son and saw that his eyes were wet. He felt tears in his own eyes, too.

“All right, my boy; nothing, not even my marriage, is going to make you unhappy. We’ll talk things over.”

Pieter felt a new respect for Albrecht. What an honest, obedient, loving boy he was! This unexpected display of love was touching. Pieter laid his hand on the boy’s shoulder with affection.

A few days later when he was paying one of his daily visits to Helen, old Fourment told him:

“Pieter, your son has been here. You ought to be proud of him. By the end of his visit all four of us were in tears. He came to clear up his relationship to Helen. They have scrapped with each other all through their

childhood, but now he came to offer her his friendship and affection. He said that he did not want to leave you and Antwerp, and that he would accept Helen as his stepmother, but he also said that no one could take Bella's place in his heart. He was so noble, so wise, that I was astonished and delighted. Please, Pieter, for my sake, do not send him to Brussels."

"And what is your opinion?" Pieter asked Helen.

"I won't let Albrecht go. I didn't know he was such a sweet boy. I suppose I have never really known him before."

Back at home Pieter at once went in search of his son.

"Albrecht, come here, I want to press your hand. I want to say to you the greatest thing that can be said of a man: you are a gentleman."

They embraced and kissed; a thing that happened very rarely between them.

"I will tell you something else, Albrecht. You said to the Fourments that no one could take your mother's place in your heart. I think it essential that you should know that no one can take her place in mine. And let us talk no more about this."

The excitement of hopeless longing passed and gave place to a quiet expectation of conjugal happiness. Pieter began to work. He had many jobs to do. While he himself was engaged on the Ildefonso altarpiece, his colleagues enlarged his sketches for the Whitehall panels King Charles had commissioned.

St. Ildefonso had been Archbishop of Toledo in the seventh century. He was therefore a predecessor of the Archduke Albrecht, who had held that same archbishopric before he came to Brussels. The Saint had spread the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin so zealously that he had experienced a miracle as a reward. The Holy Virgin descended into the Cathedral at Toledo and presented to her disciple a chasuble which had been embroidered in heaven. This miracle occupied the center of the altarpiece. Four female saints surrounded the Virgin as she appeared to the Archbishop. The model for one of them was Pieter's bride, a palm wreath in her hand. Helen enjoyed posing as a model; indeed she took charge of the whole studio, in which she had already been painted more than once.

His engagement was completely happy. When Van Dyck returned

from his trip to Holland, he called on Pieter immediately and told him that he had heard in The Hague of the forthcoming marriage. He kissed Helen's hand and most gracefully complimented them both.

"You are past thirty, Anthony, and still you haven't found yourself a wife."

"What am I to do when you always get in first with the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"Well, you should move more quickly, my friend. What news at The Hague?"

"I painted the Prince of Orange and his wife. It was quite an interesting task."

"Did you discuss politics?"

"No. You know that I cannot bear to even think of politics. But I met many interesting people. I should like to call your attention to a painter called Frans Hals, of whom we shall hear a great deal. A wonderful painter, full of wit and strength. He works with an amazingly sure hand."

"Have you seen him at work?"

"Yes. I played a most amusing joke on him. I visited him at Haarlem, saying that I was a very busy merchant and had only a short time to stay, but that I should like him to paint my portrait. He put aside the work he was doing and in two hours had finished a most excellent portrait. Then I told him that portrait painting seemed a very easy profession and that I would try my hand at it myself. I set up a canvas and began on it. The good Hals's mouth fell open as he watched me. I finished his portrait in an hour and a half. He stared from me to the portrait in astonishment. Then, very suspiciously, he asked: 'Tell me, Mynheer, are you not Van Dyck, a pupil of Rubens?' I began to laugh, whereupon he fell upon my neck, and I was dragged off to the nearest inn."

Anthony had many other stories of his adventures to tell. Then Pieter spoke of his travels and mentioned that King Charles had sent a special greeting to Van Dyck. They then fell into a long discussion about England, mentioning numerous earls and lords. Helen listened avidly to this talk about great men and women, palaces and receptions. The thought of aristocratic pomp always filled her with excitement. She was wild with joy when one day a document arrived from Brussels which confirmed Pieter's English knighthood and granted him the Spanish equivalent of

a *caballero's* rank. It also gave him leave to add a new quarter to the Rubens coat of arms; a lion on a golden field.

"Oh, how busy I shall be re-embroidering all the coats-of-arms," she cried. "Tell me, Pieter, do your new honors apply to me also?"

"Of course. There is a special etiquette for the wives of *caballeros*. I'll send to Brussels for the rules."

When these arrived Helen studied them the whole day long. She was quite disappointed when he told her that nowadays there were no receptions at the Brussels Court, as Clarissa nuns did not organize balls, even if they did sit on thrones.

In September came the news that the Marquis Spinola was dead. He had been ailing for a long time, but his bitter struggles with Olivarez had helped to push him to the grave. But now the Rubens household was preparing for the reception of its new mistress. Pieter could not bear to think of Helen moving into Bella's old quarters, so he changed the rooms about completely. He spent much time buying new furniture with Helen. His desires, which had sobered during recent weeks, flared up once more with the approach of the wedding day. Helen often visited her future home, ostensibly to arrange the rooms, but they spent long half hours kissing wildly. At last the happy December came, and with it the first snow. Pieter had settled all financial matters before the public notary together with his sons' guardians. On the fourth of the month the marriage contract was signed in which old Fourment stated that in view of the 'honor and respect' in which he held the bridegroom he would bear all the wedding expenses alone. The ceremony itself took place on the sixth. Pieter stood before the altar attired in his black Chamberlain's uniform. His limbs were aching a little, for earlier that morning he had spent two hours kneeling in prayer before Bella's tomb. The ceremony itself, the innumerable confused congratulations, the court representatives, the banquet at which Gevaert recited a Latin poem and the guests drank a great deal, submerged him as in a chaotic flood. The Brants were also present, sitting beside Albrecht and Nicolaas and behaving very tactfully. And Pieter took leave of them only, before slipping out quietly with Helen. In front of the house the carriage was already waiting; and, as soon as the couple were inside, the horses started off toward the Wapper as if infected with their master's eagerness. Inside the carriage Helen returned

his wild kisses with equal passion. On reaching home they ran upstairs, Helen first. On the landing she turned round and waited impatiently for him to catch up with her. But Pieter was still only halfway up, seized by a sudden fit of coughing. He was quite unable to go on for several seconds.

III

The Anglo-Spanish Peace Treaty was duly signed in London. A little later Count Voelx, Chief Court Chamberlain at Brussels, visited Antwerp, where he called on Pieter. He had been sent by his mistress to inquire about the progress of the Ildefonso altarpiece and also to give Pieter some political news in which he was certain to be interested. The three of them, the newly married couple and the distinguished visitor from Brussels, sat together in the new parlor.

"I'll gossip now," said Voelx, "but this is not Her Highness's message; indeed, she would scold me if she knew that I had been repeating it to you. And I must ask you to let what I tell you go no further."

"Naturally. You may talk freely before my wife."

"Well, now the treaty has been signed, Don Coloma's appointment ends. As poor Spinola has passed away, he is to take over the command of the army. The position of Spanish Ambassador in London is vacant. Do you know whom Her Highness proposed for it? Yourself."

Helen cried out happily.

"Wait a moment, Doña Helena," Count Voelx said. "The tragi-comic part I haven't told yet. Her Highness first wanted to discover in Madrid whether there was any objection to the appointment. In the Junta, Olivarez seconded it, but a new member rose and protested. 'It would be humiliating to our dignity,' he said, 'if Spain were represented by a man who earns his living with manual work.' Thereupon the Junta decided to nominate someone else."

"Who was this gentleman?" Pieter asked.

"Count Oñate. I tell you so that you shall know your enemies."

"Oh, Count Oñate? Isn't he the man who had a most undignified fight about nine years ago with the Venetian Ambassador, Gritti, at the entrance to the Imperial Chapel at Regensburg, because each of them wanted to precede the other? He is? Well, so I should be a humiliation to the dignity of the Crown of Spain, should I? . . . Alas, I know gentlemen of that kidney in Brussels, too, not only in Madrid. . . ."

"I know whom you mean: Prince Aarschot."

"Yes. And it isn't pride of rank that inspires these gentlemen. Count Oñate badly wanted to share in the London negotiations with Don Coloma. Prince Aarschot wanted Rubens pictures gratis or at least half price. . . . But I couldn't have gone to London in any case. I don't want to neglect my wife and my sons. And I should have had to spend my whole fortune in maintaining a fitting establishment in London. Well, I thank you for the information. It is useful to know how one stands with friends and enemies alike."

But his talk had not been sincere. It hurt him that he had not become Ambassador to England. He had not considered such a possibility; but, now that he had heard of it, he realized what opportunities it would have offered for serving his country. And again, his tenacious and successful work might have been crowned by the rank of a grandee. . . . Or even a dukedom. Helen a Duchess, the boys Dukes of Rubens. . . . But it seemed that one was allowed only to live on inherited wealth, acquired by the efforts of others. . . .

All this he kept to himself on Helen's account. For a long time she regretted and bewailed the lost position. Pieter answered her greedy questions with a wise, paternal smile. He knew that Helen loved pomp and the life of the great world. But he was glad to tell her the luxurious details of the English King's Paris wedding or of Maria Medici's reception.

He often thought of the Queen Mother these days; after the sensuous intoxication of the honeymoon he had returned to his old severe routine and was working diligently. He had many other tasks beside the St. Ildefonso altarpiece, but he gave most of his time to the Henry IV series. He had finished some sketches already; he liked best the one entitled, "The Occupation of Paris," where the canvas was divided horizontally by a Seine bridge; there was fighting on the bridge, some figures were falling into the water, while on the left the Huguenot King with a goatee appeared—he for whom Paris was worth a Mass.

And now exciting news of Henry IV's widow arrived in Antwerp. The situation between Maria Medici and Richelieu had become impossible, and there had been an open break. The Cardinal, who always acted quickly and energetically, persuaded Louis XIII to banish his mother from Court. The King signed the decree, and the Queen Mother, under a strong escort, was taken to Compiègne.

Pieter immediately stopped his work on the Henry IV series, and wrote to De Maugis asking for instructions. More recent news spoke of further energetic steps by Richelieu. He had ordered the arrest of Gaston, Prince of Orléans, as he belonged to the Queen Mother's party and was alleged to have planned the overthrow of his brother. But Prince Gaston had escaped at the last moment and was said to have fled to Burgundy. Richelieu also took action against the Dukes of Vendôme, who were pillars of the Medici faction. César and Alexandre Vendôme, bastards of Henry IV and Gabrielle D'Estrées, had been in the prison of Amboise for some years; the younger prince died. César thereupon wrote to Richelieu and indicated his willingness to join the Cardinal's party. The Cardinal did not trust him; although he liberated César, he banished him for a year. The Prince vowed to spend this year in Italy and to behave himself. When Richelieu had created in this manner a calm atmosphere in France, he turned once more to foreign politics, and confidential reports from Paris stated that he was preparing to attack Spain.

Brussels became the scene of excited warlike preparations. Count Leganez arrived to help in the recruiting of new troops; the King appointed the Marquis D'Aytona commander in chief of the Spanish-Netherlands fleet. Apart from the French attack, Holland was still threatening. Express couriers raced constantly between London, Brussels, and Madrid. The Archduchess gave orders for the preservation of peace; every step must be carefully considered in order to avoid giving Richelieu a pretext for attack.

In this delicate situation it was Prince Gaston who first turned to the Archduchess. He sent a courier from Burgundy asking for help. Isabella advised him to come to Holland, and he took her advice. But the Duke of Vendôme presented a more difficult problem, for he appeared one day in Brussels, calling at Count Voelux' palace and declaring that he had no funds and wanted to stay with the Court Chamberlain.

His appearance had a painful effect. Nothing would have been easier for Richelieu than to consider this as a hostile action and attack the Spanish Netherlands at once. Isabella refused to receive him, sending him a message that he would be safer in Holland. Duke César set out but took his time on the journey. He did not want to leave Spanish territory, as he was still hoping for support. His first stop was Antwerp, where Rockox had instructions to receive him with the minimum of courtesy and give him a broad hint to leave.

Pieter knew of all this, having received detailed information from Brussels, and he took good care to explain it to Helen. He was not surprised when one day he received a message from the Town Hall that the Duke César Vendôme wished to visit him within the hour. He went on calmly with his lunch, but Helen became very excited. She began to urge him to finish the meal.

"It isn't so urgent, my dear," Pieter said. "He isn't coming for an hour."

"But Pieter, I have to change and tidy myself. I need more than an hour."

"Why do you have to change? He is calling on me, not you. No doubt he wants to talk politics. I could tell you beforehand what he is going to say."

"Pieter, you don't want to hide me from him? I thought that you were proud of me—not ashamed."

"Are you so curious about him?" Pieter laughed.

"Terribly. I wouldn't be a woman if I weren't."

"All right, we will receive him together. But, when I give you a wink, leave us alone, sweetheart."

Helen could hardly wait until the boys had finished the cheese—she even missed the usual grace. The Duke of Vendôme arrived just at the moment when Helen stepped in her full finery from her room, and it was she who received him with perfect court manners.

"Is she your daughter?" Duke César asked with sudden interest.

"No, Your Grace, my wife."

He wanted to offer the Duke a seat, but Helen forestalled him. The Duke, a worthy son of Henry IV, looked at the lovely woman with unfeigned interest. So much so that it was almost insulting.

"Permit me, Your Excellency, to pay a tribute to your wife's beauty. I have heard a great deal of the Antwerp ladies, and now reality has proved superior to rumor."

"The Flemish are a handsome race, Your Grace," said Pieter quickly, blocking any reply Helen wanted to make. "Was your stay in Brussels pleasant?"

"Not very. I spoke to some of the grandees, and they are not very likable. Leganez is an unbearable fellow."

"He is a very clever man, Your Grace."

"Possibly, but somewhat friendlier manners would suit his brains better."

The same applies to Admiral D'Aytona. I think that somehow I insulted the whole company. At least that was what I heard. The Duke de Chimay, for instance, took it amiss that when he visited me and my son wanted to accompany him to the door I kept the boy back."

"Oh, the young prince is also here?" Helen interrupted. "Why haven't we the honor of a visit from him also?"

"You are very kind, Madame, but I cannot always take Prince Mercoeur about with me. He makes me look too old. Well, as I was saying, the *grande*es are hurt. Leganez and D'Aytona are angry because I didn't return their visits, although, of course they should know that, according to etiquette, they did not visit me; I received them in audience. And here in Antwerp I was received by a single-gun salute. I went this morning to the Citadel, and, although it sounds incredible, I wasn't allowed to enter. I am sure that when I leave here I shall again receive a mere one-gun salute."

"If *we* had guns," interposed Helen, "we should be glad to give you a twenty-one gun salute."

"Thank you very much, Madame. Rubens, I congratulate you on your wife; the Brussels Court could learn much from her. But I am afraid politics would bore her."

"By no means. The Prince of Vendôme could not say anything that would bore me."

Pieter tried discreetly to attract her attention. But she took no notice of him. She even settled herself more comfortably in her armchair.

"You are enchanting, Madame. Well then, I turn to you, Your Excellency. I came here on the pretext of inspecting your studio; but unfortunately I have no time to spend now on such things. I know that you are in close touch with the Archduchess. Tell me, would it, in spite of all, be possible for me to enter her service? She is extremely polite to me; she has nevertheless advised me to go to Holland. Could you do anything to alter her decision?"

"Does Your Grace expect a polite answer or a frank one?"

"Of course I want a frank one, and equally of course a polite one."

"Then to my great sorrow my answer will be one that cannot give Your Grace pleasure."

"So you think it impossible? Then there is no point in talking of it any further."

"In my humble opinion Your Grace could better spend his valuable time on other matters."

The Duke of Vendôme rose.

"Then I shall go to Holland. And you will be responsible if I join Richelieu. Good-by, Your Excellency. It is difficult for me to tear myself away from you, Madame. It must be easy for your husband to paint beautiful pictures if he always has you before him."

Bareheaded, Pieter accompanied him to the gate and then returned to Helen, who received him with a beaming face.

"It was terribly interesting. He was a most charming man. A pity that he left us so soon."

"Of course he left. I sent him away. He is a haughty ass, unmannered, and dangerous enough at present to cause war. And now listen, sweetheart, I must tell you one or two things. First, although on this occasion I wanted to satisfy your curiosity, I must tell you that such gentlemen do not like to have witnesses at their intimate political conversations."

"But he asked me to stay," Helen objected. "He didn't want me to go."

"He sent you away, but you wouldn't go. . . . Secondly, never interrupt anyone when they are in the middle of explaining something. Thirdly, do not extend invitations to aristocratic personages who do not come to us of their own free will—and especially when they are on political missions."

"But the Duke of Vendôme did visit us. Was he here or wasn't he?"

"He was not here. He told us himself most clearly that he had ostensibly come to visit the studio. . . . Fourthly, don't wait to be told that your presence is unwanted. Always forestall such remarks by going away in good time. Fifthly, if you do not know when to retire, watch for a sign from me, or else you may find yourself in painful situations. Sixthly, if you are complimented in too familiar terms, do not appear delighted but receive it with an expressionless face; and, if this is insufficient, politely and tactfully make the visitor adopt a more moderate tone. You must not be downcast if I tell you these things. But believe me, my dear Helen, I am more experienced than you in such matters, and one needs a great deal of experience. On the other hand, I must tell you that you are looking extremely beautiful. It is a long time since I have seen anyone so lovely."

During this recital of her errors Helen had become increasingly sorrowful, but Pieter's final compliment made her smile again.

"This dress is really beautiful, don't you think? The Duke must have found me attractive."

"I am sure he liked you. But—and this is a hundred times more important—I found you attractive."

"Thank you, Pieter, you are really kind. Tell me, wasn't this Duke very handsome when he was younger?"

"I don't know; nor does it interest me greatly. He is a worthless man—that I can say—his country means nothing to him. Today he would be prepared to fight with us against the French; tomorrow with the Dutch against us."

"I don't know what his manners in politics are like; but I found him a most pleasant man."

"Helen," said Pieter a little nervously, "you really must begin to realize that Dukes are not supernatural beings. If you hold yourself dear, no one will find you cheap. You must not be too humble, even to a Duke; I could not bear that anyone should look down on you."

Helen felt that trouble was brewing, and she cried out, her lovely face clearly betraying her childish stratagem:

"Oh, how horrid. I have a terrible cramp. Just here, above my knee."

Pieter realized that she wanted to dispel his displeasure by resorting with naïve cunning to her most certain weapon. And he had no strength to defend himself.

"Show me," he said in a rather wavering voice.

Helen showed him her knee, and just where her stocking ended she began to knead the snow-white flesh. Pieter caressed it with his fingers.

"It can't be anything. I am sure it is just imagination."

The next moment they were in each other's arms, and Pieter whispered in a hot and guilty tone:

"Now I am going to work. But not in the big studio. I am going to continue *The Nymph*. Hurry, undress."

He had furnished a studio for himself alone upstairs where he could paint Helen—after he had locked both doors so that neither the servants nor the boys could disturb him. Pieter stepped to the easel on which stood the beginnings of a picture of a nymph surprised by fauns in a copse. He picked up his brush and continued the work with rapid and certain strokes. A few moments later Helen entered the studio wearing only a silk wrap. She went to the sofa, opened the wrap and let it slide from her

shoulders to the ground. The sun shone on her; she was a statue of dazzling white beauty. Pieter looked at her and caught his breath. Her beauty was newer and more precious to him every day; there was no end to its mysteries; it was leading him on to new discoveries of proportion, of the relation between line and color. Her body was a symbol of love, too; it breathed the power of desire and surrender, the essence of existence. Helen stood there like a large shameless flower opening to the sun. She stretched herself with pleasure, glad to be free from the constriction of her stays. Then she lay down on the sofa in the pose demanded by the picture.

Pieter worked with a burning passion, and it seemed to him that never before had he painted a nude quite as he painted this one. He had always taken joy in the beauty of his models, but they had had no significance as persons for him. They had been merely artistic problems and had failed to arouse the faintest spark of sensuality in him. But Helen he could not paint save with the consciousness of happy possession. Every stroke of the brush proclaimed the memories of secret and burning moments, of heavenly beauties and earthly desire. And suddenly he remembered Bella, whom he had loved deeply and lived with for seventeen years in happy marriage. Yet she had never meant to him what he felt now. She had meant to him as much as Helen, but in a different way. Bella had been a wife, in every sense of the word; Helen was his mistress.

"Oh, how lazy I am today. Do stop working a little."

She stretched herself on the couch, and Pieter laid down his brush.

"This picture is progressing slowly enough," he said, laughing softly.

He sat down beside her on the sofa and smoothed her hair, and then let his hand stray from her neck to her beautiful rounded shoulder. He bent his head, searching for her lips. She did not open her eyes but twined her arms about his neck.

While Pieter lived happily with his new bride, Europe fell more and more a prey to war as the constellations of the powers changed. Gustavus Adolphus's troops entered Germany along the line of the Oder and met Tilly's men, who had by now lost all semblance of a disciplined army. In the course of the bloody campaign Magdeburg was besieged. Tilly's mercenaries at length took the city and immediately started a terrible massacre. Fires were set which raged so fiercely that the cathedral was the only building left standing. The fifty odd people—mostly women—who had

sought refuge in the cathedral were beheaded. Six thousand four hundred corpses were thrown into the Elbe. Tilly then went on toward Saxony. New points of tension constantly appeared in Europe, like stubborn boils that afflict the body of a sick man. The old Duke of Urbino died without offspring. Pope Urban at once occupied the Duchy and prepared for war against Florence. The French threatened the Flemish frontier. Under such circumstances it was hardly likely that Richelieu would release the Queen Mother from Compiègne, and Pieter put the Henry IV series aside.

He received news from Brussels to hold himself in readiness to leave Antwerp, as his services might be required. Prince Gaston, who was also in Burgundy, had sent to the Archduchess asking for refuge and help. This put Brussels in a painful predicament, for if hospitality had been offered to the Prince, Richelieu would certainly have taken it as an unfriendly gesture. To make matter worse, the Queen Mother escaped from Compiègne and sent word to the Archduchess from Avesnes. Isabella took advantage of the fact that the wife of Mirabel the Spanish Ambassador in Paris, was visiting Brussels. The Archduchess thereupon asked Mirabel, together with Marquis D'Aytona, to go to the Queen Mother and entreat her to do nothing to involve Brussels in war with France. D'Aytona, however, was unable to undertake the mission and suggested that Pieter should take his place. Whereupon Pieter was at once summoned to Brussels.

He had been married for six months, and since his wedding had not spent three hours apart from Helen. At first he thought of making some excuse and refusing the mission, but at last he decided to go. Helen was rather sulky because she could not understand that it was impossible for him to take her with him on such a delicate political errand. But at the last moment she told him:

"I am going to have a child, Pieter."

Pieter was so overjoyed that he delayed his departure for an hour. He was never so gentle and affectionate.

Isabella's first question was about his marriage, and Pieter described his happiness jubilantly. And, when she inspected the Ildefonso altarpiece, she remarked that marriage seemed to have affected his art for the better. When Pieter asked for his instructions, Isabella said:

"You will, as usual, get your instructions in writing. D'Aytona wrote to

the Queen Mother asking her to name a member of her retinue with whom we could negotiate. She named the Marquis Vieuville, and you will therefore negotiate with him."

Pieter set out with the Countess Mirabel, attended by court clerks and servants. The Countess proved to be a most pleasant traveling companion, and, like most Spanish diplomats, the sworn enemy of Olivarez. Their common acquaintances both in Paris and Madrid gave them a constant topic of conversation.

Avesnes was a tiny place close to the frontier. The Queen Mother, whom Pieter had not seen for a considerable time, at once began to discuss Richelieu after they had greeted each other.

"What do you think of that scoundrel, Rubens?"

"I cannot imagine to whom Your Majesty can be referring in such terms."

"Nonsense, Rubens, you know perfectly well that I am speaking of the Cardinal, that false hound whom I made into a politician."

And now for a whole half hour she held forth, finally bursting into tears in her fury. Then she turned to the Countess and recapitulated the whole story, beginning with her confinement at Compiègne and ending with the same abuses and the same tears.

In the meantime Pieter sat down with the Marquis Vieuville to discuss matters.

"Will you tell me briefly, Monsieur le Marquis, what message I shall convey to Her Highness concerning Her Majesty's wishes? What is it you want?"

"Money."

"That is certainly a brief and clear answer. But to what useful purpose do you wish to apply this money?"

"Louis XIII must be dethroned and Richelieu smoked out. That can only be done by force of arms."

"So you want civil war in France."

"That is not our end but a means. Our aim is the triumph of justice. Her Majesty the Queen Mother must triumph because justice is on her side."

"And what else is on Her Majesty's and Monsieur's side—apart from justice?"

"Well, to mention only a few: De Lignerès, Count Feuillade, Marquis

de la Ferte, De Caudray-Montpensier, the Duke of Bouillon, his brother, Duroy."

"One moment, Monsieur, I must make a note of these. . . . Any more?"

"Duke Elbeuf, Count Bellegarde, Count Demoret, the Prince of Rohan, the Marquis Boissy, and many others besides."

"Count Demoret is the half brother of the King, like the Duke of Vendôme, is he not?"

"Yes, make a note of the numbers, too. Bouillon, 4,000 foot, 1,500 cavalry. A foreign ruler, whom I cannot name, 4,000 foot, 500 cavalry. Switzerland will contribute 4,000. Someone else another 3,000. You see, we have everything except money. Richelieu has expropriated everything belonging to Her Majesty and Monsieur. . . . I also want to call your attention to French public feeling, which is capricious. Today all France is boiling against the Cardinal. But, if this mood is allowed to pass, the Cardinal will be stronger than ever. The Queen Mother and Monsieur took a great risk in leaving France; for, if their cause fails, they are in danger of being exiles for life if indeed they do not lose their lives. We need money urgently, and we ask for it at the very last moment."

"And also at the worst moment for us. We are at war with the Dutch, and this war is making great inroads into our Exchequer."

"We ask for a short-term loan only. The Duke of Feria owes us two hundred thousand ducats; Count Mirabel guarantees that amount, while he in turn is guaranteed by the Marquis D'Aytona. The Marquis is a rich man and as soon as he can, he will repay the Archduchess."

Pieter did not tell the Marquis that his instructions had contained information about this sum; D'Aytona had made the guarantee because Brussels had been expecting one million ducats from Madrid. The million had arrived indeed, but in the form of a draft; and Flanders merchants were certainly unlikely to lend money on such a security.

"Why don't you ask the Huguenots for money?"

"Impossible. Richelieu may ally himself with Protestant heretics, but we will not."

"Then why not try Florence?"

"In Florence they are afraid of Richelieu and will not give us anything. You are our only hope. If you fail us, our cause is lost. So much for our side of the matter. Now let me explain in detail what great advantages such a small investment would secure for you."

Pieter listened with only half his mind to the Marquis' long discourse. He was far more occupied with his own thoughts. This request seemed to present an excellent opportunity to create internal troubles in France. If Richelieu could be gravely embarrassed, the cause of European peace would be greatly served.

"If you have this material in writing, let me have it," said Pieter. "I will study it carefully, and tomorrow we may go over everything again, point by point."

The negotiations continued for several days. One morning, however, Vieuville brought startling news. By some means Richelieu had discovered who were meeting in this out-of-the-way village; French troops were close at hand, and it seemed likely that both the Queen Mother's and Rubens's parties would be attacked or arrested. It was imperative, therefore, that they should move farther inside Flemish territory, and Pieter suggested that Mons would be a suitable rendezvous. This advice was acted upon, and the negotiations were continued at Mons. Toward the end Pieter wrote a long letter to Olivarez:

Apart from God Himself, only Your Excellency can help these people in their trouble. It is absolutely essential that money should be sent at once to start the campaign—before food supplies are exhausted and the granaries are empty. It is, indeed, a matter of a very small sum whether we put Monsieur into our debt for all time or whether we decide against his cause and so lose all advantages that supporting him would bring us. If he does not obtain help from us, he will appeal to the Dutch, and indeed the Prince of Orange has already offered him safe asylum in Holland. Both Monsieur and the Queen Mother have irrevocably decided not to appeal to the Huguenots for help, partly because they have no wish to ally themselves with the heretics, partly because their only quarrel is with the Cardinal. It would be worth millions to Spain to achieve the downfall of so dangerous an enemy as Richelieu; but now there is an opportunity to achieve this desirable end at no great cost to ourselves, for French blood only would be spilt, and, no matter what the ultimate outcome of the struggle, France, our greatest enemy, would be weakened. If we allow Monsieur's army the right of transit to attack Calais or Sedan, we are affording him less help than the French King gives the Dutch in allowing them to recruit mercenaries in Paris itself. Indeed the King himself signs the commissions of the officers of those regiments stationed in Holland and such regiments are commanded by Marshals, Dukes, and priests of France. To set Monsieur on his

way requires three hundred thousand gold talers, at twelve reales each, and this sum includes the two hundred thousand already guaranteed by Count Mirabel. This is less than two months' state expenditure in Flanders. If the campaign is successful, it will support and feed itself in France; if, on the other hand, it is unsuccessful, Monsieur will not be able to accuse us of not having done our utmost to help him. In any case France would be in no condition to assist our enemies in Holland and Germany. The Marquis of Vieuville tells me that the Duke of Friedland has offered his sword to the Queen Mother. The Marquis believes that if this venture secured the support of His Most Catholic Majesty, the Duke would be able to induce other German noblemen to lend their support also. In the name of the King of England, Gerbier is offering Monsieur help, and thus Scaglia, whom we expect daily, is arriving at the best possible moment.

If Your Excellency decides to act upon this advice, as indeed both expedience and honor demand, then Her Highness and the Marquis D'Aytona must be empowered to act as the changing situation may make necessary. The Marquis Santa Cruz has to be sent against the Dutch, from whom, I am persuaded, we have nothing greatly to fear at the moment. The Prince of Orange is a secret partisan of Monsieur because he is furious with Richelieu on account of the treacherous occupation of one of his fortresses. Your Excellency is well aware that I have never wanted war, that my efforts on all occasions have been directed toward securing peace. . . .

When he read through the letter, he was astonished at himself. He who hated war, force, and destruction, was apparently advocating civil war in a foreign country. And yet he knew that his conscience was clear. If Olivarez accepted the suggestion to support the Pretender to the throne of France, blood would flow like water. Men would be killed because he was writing this letter. Involuntarily a picture arose in his mind of a French soldier falling backward, a lance transfixing his breast, blood spurting from his mouth, in his eyes the terror of death. And that man would die because he, Pieter Paul Rubens, had conceived the idea that civil war in France might bring peace to Europe. The dying soldier stared at him, horrible reproach in his eyes, and seemed to say: Why are you killing me, Rubens? Have I ever harmed you? Don't send the letter. Let that wicked woman who is intriguing against her own son go packing, and take yourself home to your lovely wife. Pieter began to think that he would have to revise his opinion about the great battles of history, to say

nothing of princes and generals. Perhaps they had acted as he proposed to act now: sacrificing the living for the happiness of children still unborn.

He dispatched the letter, and negotiations came to a standstill until the reply should be received. He also sent a detailed report to the Archduchess, and some days later Isabella herself appeared in Mons. So struck had she been by his report that she was willing to brave Richelieu's anger. Maria Medici was overjoyed by the visit; she was firmly convinced that it was due to the Archduchess's compassion and little dreamed that she really owed it to the political vision of a painter. Isabella invited Her Majesty to Brussels and gave orders that lodgings of a fitting pomp were to be prepared for her in the Ducal Palace of Brabant. The two royal ladies traveled together to Brussels, while Pieter followed in the same carriage as the Marquis Vieuville and the State Secretary of the Duke of Orléans. Throughout the journey the possibility of Spain giving her financial support to the campaign was discussed.

"The outcome of this campaign is so certain," remarked Vieuville, "that when it begins I will advance fifty thousand pistoles toward its costs. And such a sum means a great deal to me, for Richelieu has exiled me and seized those of my possessions he could lay hands on."

"Oh, naturally," said Monsigot, the State Secretary. "I myself intend to give a large sum, too."

There could be no doubt that Richelieu would have to contend with a powerful and impassioned opposition. In Brussels the party was given a royal reception; the carriages passed beneath triumphal arches, and all houses were beflagged. Maria Medici waved her handkerchief from the windows of her coach, crying with joy. The Archduchess proved an excellent hostess; she accompanied her royal guest in person to her lodgings. But at her first opportunity she summoned the Marquis D'Aytona and Pieter for an urgent discussion. The Marquis was already acquainted with the contents of Pieter's memorandum, and he was lavish in his praise of it. Isabella joined in this praise, but Pieter expressed misgivings that Olivarez might yet spoil their plans. They then discussed the matter at great length, with special reference to the background of the European situation. At the moment the cause of Spain did not stand badly in Flanders. The Dutch had, it was true, occupied several important fortresses, but the advance seemed to have been halted. D'Aytona had started an immense undertaking; he was building an armada on the Scheldt.

The shipyards of Antwerp had swelled to three times their former size, and men were working on day and night shifts.

"Your Highness," said Pieter, "now that we are in a strong position we should at last get in touch with the Prince of Orange. I know it won't be easy. It will meet with more opposition in Madrid than at The Hague. But let us not be afraid of difficulties. If we could secure peace, or at least an armistice, with Holland, I should be able to say I had not lived in vain."

"Yes, the time has come," said D'Aytona. "Tilly is triumphing everywhere; and, if Monsieur is successful, he will, as King of France, undoubtedly use his influence with the Prince of Orange on our behalf."

"Yes, the time has indeed come," said the Archduchess with some excitement. "Hold yourself in readiness, Rubens, to go to The Hague to negotiate with the Prince of Orange."

They were, in fact, extremely hopeful, although they knew that everything depended on the reply of Olivarez. But, when the reply did arrive, they learned that the Junta had rejected the plan. While Rubens's diligence was highly praised, it was made clear that Spanish opinion took the view that Richelieu was too firmly in the saddle in France to be ousted by Prince Gaston and his followers. It would, therefore, be a waste of money to back the exiles.

"We might have known that this would be the answer," Pieter told the Archduchess. "It is, regrettably, my opinion that this problem has proved too large for the mental capacity of the Duke Olivarez."

"No need to embroider it," Isabella replied angrily. "Olivarez is a stubborn ass. But who is going to convey his answer to poor Maria?"

"Your Highness, let us write again to Madrid, perhaps we can persuade them to act more sensibly. In the meantime, I shall think out a plan for reconciling the Queen Mother with King Louis. If we were to succeed in this, the rest we could leave to the tenacity with which Her Majesty will work against Richelieu within France. Let us keep the Queen Mother here until we receive the final reply from Madrid."

"I cannot understand you, Rubens," Isabella fumed. "An excellent practical plan is foiled, the European peace of which you dreamed is shattered, and you do not even swear. I could tear that Olivarez to pieces. Well, are you willing to talk to the Queen Mother?"

"Yes, Your Highness, I shall ask for an audience immediately."

When Maria Medici heard of the Madrid decision, she was not ashamed to vent her grief in front of the painter. She sobbed and, in vigorous Italian, cursed the moment when she had first met Richelieu, that "*maledetto ladrone*." Pieter waited till her rage was spent. Then he told her that they were making another attempt in Madrid, and that at the same time it would be useful to examine the possibilities of a reconciliation between mother and son. Maria Medici at once began to lay down terms. The first was that Richelieu must be exiled from France; and the others were of a similar impossible nature. Pieter politely explained why such conditions would be quite unacceptable to King Louis. But after two days' discussion they agreed upon a set of terms Richelieu might accept if he were sufficiently afraid of Monsieur's faction.

"Your Highness," said Pieter to Isabella, when this agreement had been reached, "I beg your permission to return home."

"You propose to leave me alone with this tigress and in the midst of all this trouble and excitement?"

"Your Highness, I am a newly married man, and my wife is expecting a child."

"Well, that does put a different complexion on the matter. Indeed, from one point of view it is satisfactory that you are going home, as the Queen Mother wants to visit Antwerp and I am taking her there next week. I have commanded that she shall be given a fitting reception, and you had better see that everything is in order."

On his arrival home Helen received him with complaints and reproaches. The doctor said that the baby would be born in January, and it was already August.

"It is a pity that you feel so low-spirited," said Pieter, trying to cheer her. "The Queen Mother is coming to Antwerp, and there will be some brilliant festivals. I am sorry you won't be able to witness them."

By next day Helen felt much better. At the end of a week she was admiring herself in the new dress she had flattered Pieter into buying for her. Every house in the city was now beflagged and decked with garlands; the streets spanned by triumphal arches; the Town Hall was gaudily decorated with flags, the city colors and coats of arms. Pieter and his family were given a box in the court section of the scaffolding erected before the Town Hall. Pieter should have taken his place in the retinue of the Archduchess and the Queen Mother, but he had excused himself,

saying that he preferred to watch the procession at his wife's side. The bands blared in the square, horses' hooves clattered, and the members of the guilds stood beneath their flags. Under the banner of the St. Luke Guild stood Snijders, Van Dyck, young Breughel, old Van Noort, Wildens, Teniers. Salutes were fired, and under the royal canopy, amidst the brilliant and bejeweled gathering, a plump old nun, the Archduchess Isabella, took her seat at the left hand of her French guest. Helen was immensely excited and impressed by the surrounding pomp; she enjoyed crowds and ceremonies.

"Pieter," she asked, a little startled by her own daring, "is it possible for you to present me to Her Highness and the Queen Mother?"

He laughed and patted her plump, white hand.

"My dear, it is perfectly possible, for tomorrow both of them will be calling on you."

"Oh, please don't laugh at me. I asked the question seriously."

"And I answered you seriously. A few minutes ago a court steward whispered that the two ladies are to visit us tomorrow at half past ten."

As soon as the mystery play was over, Helen dragged Pieter home in a great hurry. There he did everything possible to prepare his house for the royal guests: he decorated the façade with bunting and garlands; he borrowed from all the members of his family so that the ladies should tread only on the finest carpets after they had alighted from their carriage; he tidied up the studio and selected his best pictures to place against the walls, giving a place of honor to those of the Henry IV series which were ready. Early next morning, assisted by a groom and his two sons, he almost denuded the garden of flowers, and with these he brightened the living room and the studio. Helen, who usually rose late, was in the kitchen at six, helping her mother to prepare sweetmeats and cakes. Well, before half past ten Pieter stood with his family in front of the beflagged and garlanded gate. A huge crowd had assembled outside the house, but, foreseeing this, Pieter had summoned several halberdiers to keep the people in order. The two royal ladies arrived accompanied only by Count Voetulx and the Marquis Vieuville. The crowd cheered them wildly; Isabella nodded sedately and Maria Medici fluttered her handkerchief, trying to show how fond she was of the Flemish people.

"Your Majesty and Your Highness, permit me to present my wife and my sons by my first marriage."

Helen and the boys bowed deeply. Maria Medici looked attentively at Helen.

"I have already heard how beautiful you are, Madame, and my informants have by no means exaggerated."

She patted Helen's face affectionately.

"Well, well, once upon a time I also was as young as you," and then, turning to Pieter, "and these are your sons. What handsome boys they are."

Isabella also showed considerable interest in Helen, and, so that it might not be thought that she showed less favor, she, too, patted her face. Helen, for her part, was almost swooning with happiness.

"You were right to marry her, Rubens. Are you very happy?"

"Very," both of them answered together.

First the party visited the studio, which, as Pieter had sent his collaborators home, was completely empty. Maria Medici at once noticed the finished pictures of the Henry IV series and began to blubber.

"You see, that horrible man has robbed me of everything. I cannot even dispose of my own fortune. And when I think of the Palais Luxembourg standing forsaken, my heart breaks. I wonder if these pictures will ever hang there?"

"Let us hope so, Your Majesty," said Pieter, knowing that that very same day he was going to send the pictures into storage, perhaps for ever.

The other pictures were then inspected. Albrecht and Nicolaas, according to Pieter's instructions, had vanished. Helen was being entertained by Vieuville and Voelx. Pieter glanced at her several times, finding her laughter a little too loud.

"Leave her alone," Maria Medici said. "It is a wonderful thing to be young and gay." And then to Helen, "You haven't a care in the world, have you, my dear?"

"Only one, that Your Majesty should feel content in my humble home."

This answer pleased Pieter, but he began to feel suspicious. He knew court life well enough to realize that the Queen Mother was rather overdoing her affability toward Helen. No doubt it was in her interests to show Pieter as much favor as possible, but her friendly manner went beyond anything such considerations demanded. After inspecting the studio, they went into the private rooms and there, too, looked at the pictures. In one of the rooms *The Nymph* was on the easel, finished.

"Oh, what a wonderful nude," Count Voelx said, enraptured.

"Be chary of your comments, Your Excellency," Pieter laughed. His tone was not quite free of bragging. "My wife was the model."

All stopped in front of the canvas. Helen preened herself proudly, not a bit abashed but rather triumphant as the others stole glances first at her figure and then at the painting.

In the drawing room Helen offered refreshments. Isabella merely touched them out of politeness, but Maria Medici did full justice to the sweetmeats.

"I am my own worst enemy," she told Helen. "I love sweets—that is why I am growing so fat."

"Your Majesty is most beautiful. Fat, fair, and forty, my husband told me, was the ideal beauty in London. That is why he loves so much to paint Your Majesty."

"How sweet you are! I am going to give you this fan as a keepsake. Only let me keep it until I leave because it's terribly hot."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Helen simpered. "This is the greatest moment of my life."

"At least you won't forget the poor, deceived, persecuted French Queen. Rubens, come and sit beside me, I want to talk to you privately."

Pieter hurried to her side. They sat down, at a little distance from the others.

"Rubens, you are a rich man, and, I know, loyal to me. I want to borrow some money from you. You know my position, I can't ask anyone else here. I am unable to meet my personal expenses. I am in the most painful embarrassment, and no one must know of it, as financial troubles make all partisans suspicious. Vieuville is the only one who knows about it. Look at the jewels I am wearing—but cautiously, the others must not notice. I shall give you a letter of credit with these jewels as security."

"For how long does Your Majesty wish this loan?"

"Naturally for a short term with the usual commercial interest in Antwerp. I need about twenty-five thousand ducats; Vieuville will give you the details."

"It shall be at Your Majesty's disposal within a short time."

"Thank you, Rubens. You have relieved me of great anxiety. . . ."

She rose, glanced at the Archduchess, who nodded, and they took a ceremonial farewell. When the carriages had vanished, Helen told Pieter

that the Archduchess had inquired about her health and made some very flattering remarks about her Court Chamberlain. Upstairs Helen's mother was waiting to hear the details of the great event. Helen embraced her in her happiness.

Pieter saw that mother and daughter wanted to have a long excited talk, so he left to restore the house to normal again. Next day he had a conversation with Marquis Vieuville and took steps to procure the necessary cash for the loan. Then he called on the Archduchess, who had bad news for him. Olivarez had definitely refused to help the Prince of Orléans. Count Mirabel, the Spanish Ambassador in Paris, declared that it was impossible to reconcile King Louis and his mother. He refused to submit the plan to Richelieu. And it was once more Pieter's task to bring the unpalatable news to the Queen Mother.

Maria Medici received Pieter in a brief interval between parades, festivals, audiences, and inspections. She handed him her letter of guarantee and accepted the cash with greedy pleasure. But the political report which he rendered depressed her greatly.

"So there is no hope for me here any longer?"

"It pains me to say so, Your Majesty, but any further step would be in vain."

"Well, I must resign myself to the facts. I am going to Holland—perhaps I shall have better luck there. I don't want to interfere with your decisions, but I think that Spain has thrown away a splendid opportunity."

She left with the same elaborate ceremonial as on her arrival. The guns roared, the court carriages rumbled proudly between the beflagged houses. Pieter and Helen walked home arm in arm. Pieter was gloomy. He, too, thought that Spain had missed a great chance. Perhaps not only for herself but for the whole of Europe.

"How unhappy I am," he thought.

Helen twittered like a gay bird at his side:

"You know, these days have passed like a fairy dream, beautiful festivals and spectacles, the play at the Jesuit Monastery . . . and the Queen and Archduchess visited me . . . what a distinction! . . . every woman in Antwerp envies me. . . . How happy I am. . . ."

IV

At the same time as the Queen Mother left Flanders, Spain suffered a terrible misfortune. The Dutch made a sudden attack and annihilated the newly built fleet, which was just about to put to sea. Not a single plank of the armada was left whole. Soon afterward the news of the Battle of Breitenfeld arrived: Gustavus Adolphus had won an immense and gory victory over Tilly. Tilly was fleeing headlong to save the remnants of his army and his own life. He had been severely wounded and had lost his guns and treasury.

Pieter was sitting in Marquis D'Aytona's room, discussing the war situation with great anxiety.

"Gustavus Adolphus cannot be beaten," the Spanish Admiral said. "He is unsurpassable in military matters. He is using light cannon with four-pounder balls. His pikemen carry lighter and shorter pikes than the imperial troops. He lays the greatest emphasis on getting his musketeers to fire as rapidly as possible. His order of battle is also different. Have you ever seen a 'regular battle'? No? Well, the men are usually drawn up in ten lines. When the first lines have discharged their muskets, they retire quickly to let through the next file of men. All this, of course, takes time. The Swedes do it differently. Their ranks do not move but fire all the time with devilish speed. Immense strength and speed—and what is on our side? Ancient slowness, pigheaded clinging to tradition, incompetent leaders. But Gustavus Adolphus's main advantage is that all his soldiers are Swedes and they fight for their own country."

"Pardon me, Your Excellency, but Tilly's soldiers are all Catholics and they fight for the Church."

"You cannot mean that seriously. Tilly's Croatian mercenaries are willing to go as far as Leipzig—for money—but do you think they ever give a thought to the Church? Did the Walloons dream of it at Breitenfeld? No, Rubens they are mercenaries, murderers, a horrible horde of robbers and cutthroats. But the Swedes follow their King—for the sake of

Sweden. They fight for an idea . . . our men for gold. And the Dutch are patriots, too. Spain is in a very bad position, my friend."

"Your Excellency, for many years I have been propounding the idea of making peace with the Dutch. But the Archduchess is hampered gravely by the unalterable attitude of the Spanish crown that Holland belongs to the King of Spain, who can never relinquish it."

"And what is your answer to this attitude?"

"That it must be relinquished. We might be able to sign an armistice without this concession—but I doubt it. The Dutch are unwilling to suspend hostilities without their independence being acknowledged. But I think that with sufficient skill in negotiations they might be persuaded to waive this condition."

"In that case negotiations ought to be started as soon as possible. I know that you need no encouragement to work for peace—but you must keep at it all the time. The Archduchess is wise and tolerant, but she is also old and ailing. Who knows what will happen if she dies. We must hurry, Rubens."

They shook hands as if sealing a pact. But nowadays Pieter went but seldom to Brussels. He grudged every day he could not spend with Helen. Marriage had not tempered the desire which the young girl had awakened in him some years ago—on the contrary, the fire burned even brighter. Pieter knew clearly what had happened: his whole life long he had ruled his desires with severe self-discipline, but now he was overwhelmed by them in his mature years. Every day saw this weakness increase.

One day Albrecht said to him:

"Father, you may remember that when you wanted to send me to Brussels I asked to be allowed to stay at home. . . . But lately I have been thinking a good deal about my career and I've come to the conclusion that it would be better after all if I went to Brussels. I feel ashamed to live without working. Let me take up my post at Court, Father, as you wished. I know that it will be unpaid to begin with, but I want to feel that I am useful. After all, I'll be eighteen soon."

"I shall miss you greatly, my boy," Pieter said quietly. "Have you no other reason for wanting to go away?"

"None at all. Helen is kind to me, I get on very well with Nicolaas,

and I love Antwerp, where all my friends and relatives are. But I must think of my future."

"Well, I realize that—but I am sorry that you must go. We have had little time for each other of late—but you know that you are nearest to my heart. . . . In a few days we can go together to Brussels, and I shall help you to settle down decently and comfortably."

"Thank you, Father. And now I must go to Grandfather's."

Albrecht had spent little time at home recently—and Pieter knew that this was because of Helen. There was never any quarrel or scene between them. Albrecht behaved with faultless friendliness and politeness toward his stepmother. But Pieter knew that the sensitive boy felt himself to be in the way. He also knew that Albrecht treasured his mother's memory; he kept in his room small objects which had belonged to her, and went to pray at her grave every week. His father's second marriage must have made him suffer. He had tried to live in the same house as his father and stepmother but had found it impossible.

Pieter was deeply disturbed. For all practical purposes he was to lose his son—because he could not give up possession of a pretty girl he violently desired. He could have salved his conscience with the excuse that he had planned to send Albrecht to Brussels long before his marriage to Helen had been arranged. But his sense of justice was too strong and honest for such evasions. Albrecht was suffering—and he was to blame. Albrecht had secrets from him—and his son had never kept anything from him in the past. Pieter felt that the wound he had received was incurable. And his pain was made more acute when he told Helen that Albrecht was going to Brussels.

"Really? I am sorry," she replied. "I am going to miss him very much."

The words were impeccable. But there was a sudden gleam of relief in her eyes which showed the stress under which stepmother and stepson had been living. Pieter took his son to Brussels, obtained a room for him at the palace, introduced him to the clerks of the Chancellery and supplied him with advice and warning. Yet he was careful not to indulge in any sentimentalism. But, as he embraced him when parting, all his self-control vanished.

"Think of me with affection, my boy. I shall think a great deal of you."

"I, too, shall be thinking all the time of you two."

"We two?"

"Yes, of you and poor mother."

"All right, my boy. I, too, shall be thinking of you in the same way—of you and your poor mother."

He turned away and did not look back because he was afraid of breaking down. At home he found everybody gay and carefree. Helen and Nicolaas were playing with some puzzle, laughing a great deal over it. The adaptable and pliable nature of the younger boy had soon created a warmer relationship with his stepmother. No one seemed to miss Albrecht—except his father.

Then the time came when Nicolaas had to move for a few days to his grandparents: Helen's hour was approaching. Her baby was born on the eighteenth of January—and it was such an easy birth that the midwife was astonished. The child was a girl, big and healthy, eager to feed all the time. Her mother was still not yet eighteen. The baby was baptized in St. James's Church, receiving the names of Clara Johanna, her godmother being Helen's mother, her godfather old Brant. Helen had wanted some aristocrat, but Pieter was anxious to maintain his old cordial relations with the Brants.

Van Dyck was now a fairly frequent visitor to the Rubens house. World famous already, he was but a young man of thirty-three. He had become extremely handsome and, as always, oscillated between the extremes of boundless optimism and black despair. After one of his visits, Helen said:

"Pieter, your Van Dyck seems to like me a great deal."

"Of course he does. You are very beautiful, everybody admires you."

"But not in that way. I saw his roving eye. He was looking at the coverlet and the lines of my body underneath it."

"That doesn't mean anything, my dear," Pieter laughed. "He, too, is a painter. For us a nude has a different significance than for other mortals."

"Don't spoil my triumph," joked Helen. "I've been telling myself already that he has fallen in love with me."

She laughed, and the subject was dropped. But Pieter was disconcerted. Not by jealousy but by the realization that he might one day be madly jealous. He had never felt like that at Bella's side. But now he was getting on toward fifty-five—and Van Dyck was a very handsome man. He remembered how he and Bella used to smile at Anthony's youthful

infatuation. Yet nowadays if he were to notice any sign of amorousness in his former pupil he would be unable to laugh. He did not want to be jealous. He knew the destructive power of jealousy and had always despised it in others. He preferred to nip the trouble in the bud. He invited Van Dyck often and left him alone with Helen. And this attitude turned out to be the right one. Helen was soon complaining that Van Dyck was very boring and that she did not want to spend so much time with him. Anthony, too, did not seem too enthusiastic about the frequent invitations. It was said in Antwerp that he had some serious liaison, though no one knew who the lady was. He never spoke of his emotions to anyone, but that he had his escapades was proved by the fact that he had a little girl in his house who was tended and spoiled by his sisters. Everyone knew that she was Van Dyck's daughter, though no one had any idea who her mother might be. Now he announced suddenly that he was once more going to London; King Charles had sent him an invitation which he would accept. On his departure Pieter discovered that he had not quite managed to rid himself of jealousy, for he felt distinct relief although he had no grounds for the slightest suspicion.

The next time he visited Brussels he found Isabella very angry with Olivarez.

"He is, after all, subsidizing the Prince of Orléans. It is monstrous. When there was a wonderful opportunity to bring Richelieu to a fall, he simply swept your sensible memorandum from the table, and, in the meantime, Richelieu has been far from inactive. The Queen Mother is working in vain in Holland—and yet while she was here in our hands we could have used her to the greatest advantage. Now everything is too late. At the moment Richelieu is unassailable. And what is Olivarez doing? He is sending Prince Gaston to me. *Now* he is willing to help. And Prince Gaston is just as stupid as Olivarez. He wants to attack France."

"Is he in Brussels?" Pieter asked.

"Yes, strictly incognito. I won't let you talk to him. He has got married—also with the greatest secrecy—to the daughter of the Duke of Lorraine, in the hope of gaining an ally. Well, I don't mind what he does. Olivarez is just wasting money. I have never seen such stupidity: to let the enemy grow in strength and then attack him when he is at his most powerful. I can tell you, Rubens, I am tired of it all. I had rather go back to my nunnery."

"But Your Highness mustn't do that; not now!"

"Unfortunately, I must stay at my post. But there is also bad news from the country. The nobles around Limburg are behaving most suspiciously. In some way the Prince of Orange is inciting them against Spain. You must prepare yourself for new tasks."

"Your Highness, I have a small baby at home and a young wife."

"A most lovely wife, too. I know, it's a sacrifice. But I know also that I can count on you. So be ready."

"I am at Your Highness's service. But I can only repeat that we must make an armistice with Holland."

"Oh, keep off the subject! You know I want it at least as much as you do. Is your son happy in Brussels?"

"Thank you, Your Highness, yes. I take great pleasure in him—he a grown-up gentleman. I am sure, he will prove an admirable successor to me."

He had no cause for anxiety about Albrecht—but politics worried him greatly. A short time after his trip to Brussels a French nobleman visited him, proving to Pieter's satisfaction that he was a secret emissary of Prince Bouillon, Monsieur's partisan. He did not dare to go himself to Brussels, but asked Pieter to transmit this message: The Prince thought the time now ripe; Monsieur should borrow twelve hundred men from the Brussels government and occupy Sedan; the whole of France would rise as one man against Richelieu. Pieter at once notified the Archduchess. No one in Antwerp suspected that the signal for the belated civil war in France had been given from the Rubens studio. The Prince of Orléans secured his twelve hundred soldiers and duly occupied Sedan. Now the news from France had to be awaited. Pieter had no hopes at all. Naturally, Isabella, D'Aytona, and Pieter himself turned out to be right. Instead of a large-scale revolt, the Duke of Montmorency alone took the field against Richelieu; all the other members of Prince Gaston's party remained inactive. The Duke of Lorraine was on the point of marching against France, but Richelieu found no difficulty in quelling the revolt, as he had known for a long time whom to bribe or to intimidate. Louis XIII occupied Lorraine and sent an army against Montmorency. The latter was an old-fashioned fellow who conceived war as a chivalrous affair; he himself intended to fight on an armored horse, a jousting lance in his hand. His army was much larger than that of Richelieu. But a simple

soldier ended the war by firing a single musket shot which wounded Montmorency, so that he was taken prisoner. Monsieur threw himself on his brother's mercy and Richelieu granted him full pardon. The Cardinal now devoted all his energies to preparing for war against Spain. And no less alarming news came from another direction. The Prince of Orange had entered Limburg and convened a meeting of the noblemen, calling upon them to revolt against Spain. He then established himself in the province and proceeded to lay siege to certain important Flemish fortresses. Isabella was beside herself with fury and helplessness. She sent for Pieter.

"Go at once to Liège," she said, "and discover for me what really is happening in Limburg. Each report I receive contradicts the last. From there you can witness the siege of Maastricht, and you can send me daily reports. Maastricht is besieged by the Prince of Orange himself, and this is the right moment for you to get in touch with him. Your credentials are already prepared. I beg you to start this very day."

"Your Highness, I came to Brussels only for the day. I have not even said good-by to my wife."

"If a man is involved in politics and wishes to be of service to his country, he has no time for private life. Send your wife a letter and remember me to her."

Pieter had thus no alternative but to start for Liège at once. The situation there was easily analyzed. The Flemish nobility was huffed because the Brussels Court persisted in employing Spaniards in Flemish government posts. Van Bergh, who had been relieved of his post as commander in chief as a result of Pieter's reports on his personal conduct, was the most clamant critic. Another was the Duke of Aarschot, whose boundless greed and ambition incited him to seek service in the state. These two were joined by Duke Epinoy, the Dukes Bersanson and Bussonvielle, and Count Egmont; but the Dean of Cambrai, Carondelet, and his two brothers seemed the most dangerous. It was noteworthy that not one of these gentlemen had joined the Prince of Orange: for the rebellion had been inspired, not by him but by Richelieu.

Pieter was thus faced with a double task. He decided to deal first with the French-provoked rebellion, and sent a detailed report to the Archduchess containing numerous suggestions. The Archduchess took immediate steps to have the Carondelet brothers arrested, while the Duke of

Aarschot received a most friendly invitation to Brussels, where the Archduchess had an important political mission awaiting him. These proved excellent moves, for the local nobility now feared arrest, on the one hand, and were disposed, on the other hand, to listen to the Duke of Aarschot, who, after his court invitation, had become much more peaceably inclined.

It now remained to tackle the Prince of Orange. Maastricht had surrendered, and the Dutch had entered the fortress. Pieter wrote to him asking for an audience; he received an immediate reply to the effect that the Prince would be glad to receive the envoy of the Archduchess. Pieter at once set out. Frederick Henry, the ruler of the Dutch Netherlands, offered him a seat on his arrival, but sat staring at him in anything but a friendly manner for some little time without saying a word.

"We are enemies, Rubens," he brought out at last.

"Your Grace, the messenger of peace can hardly count as an enemy."

"That is not what I mean, Rubens: you and I are enemies in a different sense. I know who you are; the son of the man who caused one of the greatest sorrows and humiliations of my father's life. I heard of the shame inflicted upon our house when I was a child. It might have been concealed from me, but I do know of it, and I am proud to deny it."

"Why do you seek to humiliate me, Your Grace? The fault is not mine. You love your father's memory, but I, too, loved my father. This old and unhappy story should not stand between us any longer."

"That may be so. But, when I look at you, I cannot help remembering Anne of Saxony who was the cause of my father's disgrace. And now tell me why you have come."

"Her Highness the Archduchess Isabella has sent me to explore the possibilities of an armistice."

"This is not the first time you have been involved in such negotiations. My late brother Maurice told me all about it. You see, it is by no means easy for our family to forget your name. You are therefore aware of Holland's attitude in this matter of an armistice: the Spanish must withdraw from the whole of the Netherlands, including Antwerp. That was my brother's answer, and it is my answer also."

"Your Grace desires war no matter what happens?"

"I am aware that you are an apostle of peace, and I appreciate that. War is an evil, peace is a blessing. But let me ask you what is the cause of this war. Is it the hard-working nation that desires no more than to

live in peace, develop its trade, and fear God? Or is it the powerful tyrant nation, intent upon conquest and the subjugation of unwilling peoples?"

"The Spanish Netherlands are the lawful inheritance of the Spanish crown, Your Grace. If one has children, it is difficult to renounce a lawful inheritance."

"That is true. The Dutch were once free, and handed on freedom to their children as an inheritance. How can a Dutchman forsake the cause of freedom if he has children? Spain acquired Holland by force; we have taken our country back by force. We have no alternative but to defend it by force of arms. Not gladly, you must understand, but out of dire necessity. There is not a Dutchman who would not prefer to live at peace with his neighbors if it were possible to do so. It is difficult for us to understand each other, Rubens. We speak different languages. You think in terms of the imperial idea, of the divine inheritance of the Hapsburgs, of the so-called proper submission of a cowed and conquered people, above all, of the sacredness of the crown itself, which you believe is endowed with miraculous powers. Living under Spanish rule, you have forgotten what nationhood is. We, on the other hand, have not forgotten that we are a nation in Europe, a nation which is disliked because it is diligent and strong, a nation which desires nothing but to exercise its right to live and work. The world knows this, and therefore makes every effort to crush it. I tell you we can do nothing but fight those who are attempting to crush us. We demand sovereignty over those territories which provide us with our livelihood. When we attempt to defend ourselves you clamor that these barbarians, the Dutch, are fighting with bestial and ruthless cruelty. You are careful to say nothing of the Duke of Alva, of Hoorn, or of Egmont. But your King may send a hundred Dukes of Alva against us, he may constrict us with hoops of iron, he may close every port in the world against us; in the end it will avail him nothing. If you tell me that I am an instigator of war, I reply that I believe in peace as the supreme good, but that I am not willing to die merely to provide you with the kind of peace you seek. You are the one who desires war, you, who cry peace and yet support the claim of a monarch who wishes only to crush a hard-working and peaceful nation."

After this long speech, the Prince fell silent. Pieter did not speak for some time.

"This is the first time I have heard Holland's case put with such elo-

quence," he said at last. "I must consider carefully what you say. I must confess that it has never occurred to me that I could appear as an emissary of war."

"What is war? Any kind of force used aggressively. Your presence here represents Spanish force; I, on the other hand, represent self-defense and therefore peace. I repeat that it is impossible for us to understand each other. I will not negotiate with Spain, although I might negotiate with Flanders. Her Highness, of whom I have heard much that is good, and indeed noble, has never summoned the States General of Flanders. It is Flemish opinion I am prepared to consider, not the mouthings of Olivarez. Take this message to the Archduchess, to whom I send my respectful greetings."

"One more question, Your Grace," said Pieter rising. "If the Flemish States General send representatives to The Hague, are you willing to discuss peace with them?"

"Yes, I am."

"Thank you, Your Grace. May I ask for an armed escort to Liège?"

Their eyes met for the last time. The son of William the Silent stared grimly at Rubens. Pieter cantered homeward deep in thought. His sense of justice was always perfect, and now he had to confess that Prince Frederick Henry was right. The claims of Spain were motivated by selfish greed, those of Holland by the love of freedom.

In Brussels the palace was seething with intrigue. Isabella, however, received Pieter at once.

"Your Highness, whatever happens to me, I must speak frankly—although it may sound like sacrilege. I think the Dutch are right."

"I have known it for a long time," Isabella replied simply. "But what can we do about Madrid?"

Pieter reported in detail his conversation with the Prince.

"It's not at all a bad idea, Rubens," the Archduchess said, after listening carefully. "If I assemble the Flemish States General, home policy will be relieved of tension. And they *can* go to The Hague to negotiate. After all, the last word rests with the King. . . . By the way what has this loathsome Aarschot against you?"

"We don't like each other, Your Highness. He wanted to blackmail me into giving him pictures for practically nothing. He is very vain and

treacherous—but he can be handled easily through his vanity. Has he already put in his claims for some distinguished position?”

“I can hardly get rid of him; he has not yet decided what he wants to demand. I think he must have received a large bribe from Richelieu.”

“I am sure of it—but he should be kept on our side; he has great influence with the nobility.”

“I’ll do my best. Now go home to your wife and wait until I send for you again.”

At home every day brought some new report of the European conflagration. The Duke of Montmorency had been executed. Gustavus Adolphus had been mortally wounded in the Battle of Lützen, which his troops turned into a memorable victory. His infant daughter Christina would hardly replace the great general, and this was Richelieu’s loss. The Dutch had already occupied the fortresses of Venloo, Roermond, and Maastricht. After a lapse of thirty-two years, Isabella had summoned the States General of the Spanish Netherlands. There were long orations, and it was decided to get in touch with Holland. Three men were sent to Maastricht, and they brought back the answer that Holland was willing to negotiate with a parliamentary committee of Flanders. Ten members were elected—among them Aarschot and Bopen, the Archbishop of Mechlin, as leaders.

One December day a courier arrived in Antwerp with the message that Pieter should start at once and prepare for an absence of several weeks. He consoled Helen as best he could; she was expecting her second child next summer although little Clara was only eleven months old. Pieter had recently painted his wife, himself, and Nicolaas in a garden scene.

Isabella told Pieter that he was to go to The Hague. Officially he was to give information about the previous negotiations of many years ago. In fact he was to keep his eye on Duke Aarschot, who was behaving in a most suspicious manner.

“Your Highness, this is the first mission of such a kind I have ever undertaken. The Duke is a personal enemy of mine, and anything may happen.”

“I know. That is why I do not dare to entrust the matter to anyone except yourself. I am afraid that in spite of everything Aarschot will make some kind of secret pact with the French Ambassador at The Hague. Suggest to me anyone to take your place—if you can.”

Pieter, indeed, could suggest no one, and he therefore wrote to Prince Frederick Henry.

Your Grace:

Her Highness, the Archduchess, wishes me to proceed to The Hague at once to assist our representatives there with one or two points on which I have special knowledge. I therefore beg Your Grace to supply me with a passport for myself and two or three servants. I hope Your Grace will grant me this favor, and I remain Your Grace's most obedient and humble servant,

Pieter Paul Rubens.

He hoped he could wait at home until the passport should arrive. But he was not to go to The Hague after all. It appeared that the representatives of the Brussels States General had already spent much time discussing him, on the pretext that he had already opened negotiations in Maastricht and that if this were so the committee ought to be informed of what was happening. They decided in the end to write to the Infanta asking precisely what instructions she had given to Rubens, since it was being suggested that unauthorized negotiations had been taking place. The Duke of Aarschot had made the most violent speeches and did everything possible to incite his colleagues against Pieter. He argued that his presence at The Hague could in no way assist their deliberations. As a result of this animosity, the archbishops of Ypres and Namur and Baron Hoboken were sent to Brussels to protest to the Archduchess against the unwarrantable interference of Rubens. Isabella replied that Rubens was going to The Hague at her request and that his duties would be to provide the committee with such special information as they might require; he would take with him all correspondence appertaining to all previous negotiations. The two archbishops and the Baron returned to The Hague in a bad humor. The committee refused to listen to the Archduchess's explanations about Pieter, and decided not to hear his reports even if he were sent. Pieter therefore went to Brussels to see Isabella and also wrote a letter to Duke Aarschot who was once more in Brussels.

Your Grace:

I have been greatly distressed by Your Grace's objections to my being granted a passport. I have only done my duty, and Your Grace may be assured that I am always prepared to render a full account of my actions. I have never received any instructions from my superiors to act in any way contrary to the interests of Your Grace or to the

welfare of our country. Believe me, I should not hesitate to condemn any person who tried to hamper the negotiations in any way. I cannot imagine what harm could have been done to our cause by my handing certain relevant documents to Your Grace at The Hague and explaining their significance before the committee.

I am,

Yours respectfully,

Pieter Paul Rubens.

When the answer came, Pieter read it with burning cheeks and the paper trembled in his hand:

Mynheer Rubens,

I read in your letter that you are disturbed by our refusal to grant you a passport to visit The Hague, and also that your conscience is clear and that you are always willing to render an account of your actions. Consider yourself honored to receive this reply to a letter which was written as to a person of equal rank and not in the form of a report, as your status and duty called for. I was at the inn from eleven to one and returned again at six in the evening, so you had ample time to call on me. I must also add that everyone at The Hague was astounded to learn that on being asked by Her Highness to submit certain documents to the committee you failed to dispatch them at once, but asked for a passport to deliver them in person. I am not interested in the condition of your conscience or in any account you can render of your actions. I can only recommend you to adopt another tone next time you have occasion to write to a gentleman of my rank. If you follow this advice you will be able to count on my understanding and tolerance.

The Duke of Aarschot.

And this was not all. The Duke had copies made of the letter and one was sent to every member of the committee. Someone sent one of these copies to the Archduchess, together with an alleged copy of the letter Pieter had written to Aarschot. Isabella was furious at the unparalleled rudeness of the Duke, but she also reproached Pieter for having addressed the Duke in an insulting and high-handed manner. Pieter was bewildered. Then he discovered that the so-called copy of his letter had been mischievously altered to make the Duke's attitude appear justifiable. He succeeded in proving this, and the Archduchess severely reprimanded the Duke. This scandal caused a greater sensation than the negotiations themselves. Pieter had had enough of the matter. He went to the Archduchess and said that he was unable to go to The Hague. Isabella no

longer pressed him, though it would have been to her advantage had Pieter been present at The Hague as an observer. The Prince Frederick Henry now suggested a grandiose plan: that the States General of Flanders and Holland should form an alliance, that Spain should withdraw from Flanders, and that all fortresses in the region should be dismantled. This plan was conceived on such a scale that an examination of it would require at least six months, although there was a chance that in the end something might be made of it. Thus it came about that Pieter was back in Antwerp after an absence of only a few days instead of months. He felt in his heart that he was no longer the man to negotiate with the Dutch.

One morning he returned from his ride and went to his private rooms to take a bath. Helen had just had her bath and wore only a light dressing gown trimmed with fur.

"How many times have I asked you not to walk about barefoot?" he commented a little sharply. "You will catch a cold and perhaps fall seriously ill."

"I am walking on the carpet," she smiled. "And in any case, it isn't cold."

But Pieter was no longer paying attention to her words.

"Stay as you are for a moment. Don't move."

He hurried into the next room and dashed back a moment later with his sketchbook.

"Turn a little to the right and gather the dressing gown with your right hand a little closer to your hips. Leave your breasts uncovered. . . . Yes. This will make an excellent picture, Helen."

He had forgotten completely Holland and the Duke of Aarschot. He knew exactly what he wanted to paint; a lazy, young, plump female body, the skin still dewy and suggesting the bath. The background would be brown, the dressing gown black, the carpet red.

"What will you call the picture?" Helen asked.

"It doesn't matter. The Dressing Gown, or something like that. . . ."

"Shall I be beautiful in it, Pieter?"

"No, you will look disheveled and lazy, but you will look infinitely desirable and make men mad—just as you make me mad, all the time."

V

Don Carlos, the queer, timid younger brother of King Philip, died. The Court doubted whether he had died a natural death. A rumor reached Brussels that Olivarez had assisted his demise. The unfortunate young man had long feared that he would suffer the same fate as his uncle, and now at last it had overtaken him. The King's youngest brother, Fernando, became the new focus of interest. Pieter remembered him well as a lively, fair-haired boy, fond of riding and the chase. The Cardinal's robes, which he had received at the ripe age of fourteen, fitted him ill. The King had decided that he was ultimately to take Isabella's place, and, so that he might gain experience in government, he had been appointed Governor of Catalonia. Later he was sent traveling, especially to Italy.

It was thus likely that before long this young man would be ruling Flanders from the archducal palace at Brussels. Isabella's health was bad; she was continually troubled with a disease of the liver which sometimes caused her such agony that she spent the night in misery and tears. When Pieter next visited her, she complained to him bitterly.

"I am at the end of my tether, Rubens," she said. "Don't make any protests; it's no use talking. I would gladly hand over everything to my nephew, Fernando. But so many important issues keep cropping up that I feel it my duty to stay on here. Now there are these negotiations with The Hague and the States General. The members of the States General love to hear their own voices; every man behaves as if he were the Pope, but few of them have any grasp of the situation, while most of them talk arrant nonsense. And the committee at The Hague is even worse. The Prince of Orange does what he likes with it. Do you know what he is suggesting now? That Holland and the Spanish Netherlands should organize a common army under the command of the States General at The Hague and Brussels. And this hare-brained idea is being seriously discussed! Olivarez is an ass; but he is not ass enough to consider such a proposition. It would mean a Holland of twice its present size, with twice as big an army. Within twenty-four hours Flanders would break away

from Spain. It is impossible to try for peace. If you had gone to The Hague, I might have thought differently. But as things are, peace is impossible."

"Your Highness, I am no longer a suitable man for such tasks."

"Why? Are you too beginning to feel old? You really don't look your age. You look what you are: a brisk young husband. But how old are you?"

"Fifty-six. But it's not my age that is troubling me. My memory is as sound as ever. I console myself with the example of Titian, who died when he was ninety-nine and was painting a series of masterpieces when he was over ninety. No, the trouble is not my age. The fact is, I have lost my faith in the cause I should have to represent."

"You startle me. What is this cause in which you no longer believe?"

"It is difficult to speak of it, Your Highness. For me it is a delicate subject. Perhaps I had better not say anything."

"Rubens, we have always spoken frankly to each other. And gradually you are becoming my only friend. I know you will not lie to me—you have told me only one lie and I have forgiven you that. You denied that you had started the fresh negotiations with the English; you told me they had started the ball rolling. But let me tell you that you did well; you deserved well of your country."

"Your Highness knew that?"

"I discovered it later, but I said nothing to you at the time. I only mention it now to exemplify the trust I put in you. Now, tell me, why have you lost your faith? Why will you not be frank? You know I can be depended on to understand."

"Your Highness, I must go back over recent events. I have been watching the Flemish States General, and it has touched me deeply that these men should be conscious of a narrower loyalty than that to the Spanish crown. When they refused my request for a passport, I understood them: they saw in me a courtier, the servant of a foreign conqueror. Leave out of account the Duke of Aarschot, who is a stupid and dishonest man, and consider the others. Bopen, the Archbishop of Mechlin, for instance, who has come to hate me mortally. He hates me, I who love Flanders and am just as much a Fleming as any of them. I have spent much of my time endeavoring to save Antwerp from the horrors of war; yet they see in me a traitor. Your Highness, I am deeply wounded by this hatred, but I can

understand it. . . . In my youth I was filled with enthusiasm for the Greek and Roman conceptions of liberty. For a long time William the Silent was my ideal patriot. But later I sobered down and kept in mind the elements of the actual situation. I saw that Flanders was small and helpless; I saw the paternal, wise, and kind rule of His Highness Archduke Albrecht. I had no doubts for many years. On the other hand, peace had been a fixed idea of mine ever since my childhood. I hated blood and killing, misery and force. This conviction of mine was as firm as a rock. . . .”

“Go on, Rubens. Don’t stop now. . . .”

“Your Highness, I have lost my faith both in the benefits of Spanish rule for my country and in the absolute necessity for peace. Your Highness has ordered me to confess, and I have done so. It is startling and distressing to realize that the only person to whom I can make this confession is the widow of a Hapsburg Archduke and the daughter of King Philip II of Spain. But I cannot confess it to anyone else. If Your Highness were to send me away now and never speak to me again, I should not be surprised.”

“I am not sending you away. Tell me, what has shaken your faith—both in Spain and in peace?”

“For more than twenty years I have watched in this palace the heroic struggle of Your Highness against the Spanish government. Whether it was the Duke of Lerma or Olivarez, the statesmen of Spain have been steadily destroying their country’s achievements in past centuries. Spain is now a country of the past. The future belongs to England, France, and Germany. It is not in the interest of Flanders to belong to a waning power. But I cannot tell you what should become of Flanders. Frederick Henry has an idea of his own—he would like to unite the Spanish Netherlands and Holland in a single, great country, a republic of allied provinces, supported by French power. Against this, however, there is a self-evident argument; the majority of our people are utterly alien to the French and related to the Germans. I know of only one solution, which is, of course, merely a dream: to unite with Holland, under the regency of Your Highness, independent of the Spanish government but supported by the German branch of the House of Hapsburg.”

“Be careful, Rubens,” Isabella smiled, “or the walls will collapse at such sacrilegious utterances.”

"They are going to collapse, Your Highness. Not today or tomorrow—but long after we have gone. I am no longer a suitable politician to subserve the Spanish interests. As for my pacifism, that has gone the same way. I realized this change in myself for the first time when we were planning to help the Prince of Orléans. I deliberately proposed to further civil war in France, to cause the death of thousands, the destruction of property, the misery of widows and orphans. And yet my conscience remained easy because the end I was aiming at was peace in Europe. I was willing to kill thousands to save millions. That train of thought led me to realize that war might easily become a means of peace. Then I had my talk with the Prince of Orange and recognized that the Dutch were right. I have become a partisan, Your Highness. I am no longer a suitable man for the conduct of peace negotiations."

"So you don't want to work for me any longer?"

"Your Highness, this is not an easy decision. I have no greater desire than to prove my loyalty to and affection for Your Highness in every way. But I am unable to go on serving you, Your Highness."

"I shall not try to overpersuade you, my friend. I have found that there are only two types of men in politics: those who serve their own interests while they can, and those who are honestly unable to compromise. The honest ones always have to leave the field. For the time being I must stay at my post; but soon I hope to retire to a nunnery. We are both fortunate in having a safe refuge from politics: I, in God, you with the Muses. But now let us talk of pleasanter things. . . ."

They both tried to guide the conversation into other channels; they both tried to seem cheerful—though without much success. But, when they parted, Pieter felt that he was taking more than an ordinary farewell. They were saying good-by to a task they had shared in common for more than twenty years.

Pieter then went to the Chancellery to see Albrecht. The boy had finished work for the day and was perusing some foreign newspapers which had recently arrived. These came regularly from all parts of Europe, and the Brussels Court was thus exceedingly well informed. He showed his father two of them: *Wöchentliche Zeitung* of Zurich and the *Chronicle* of Württemberg. Pieter read the articles which Albrecht had marked. Both spoke of suffering, rape, starvation, and misery.

"I can show you many others if you are interested," said Albrecht.

"They will all be the same," said Pieter. "These things have been going on for the last sixteen years. I remember what pains I took in London to induce the Spaniards to return the Palatinate to the Winter King. Do you know how many peasant families were left alive in that province? Two hundred. Europe is full of cannibals. I am getting sick of it."

"But, Father, something must be done. Honest men must band themselves together and stop this useless misery. War is the most horrible thing in the world."

"That is true, my son. But I have just arranged with Her Highness that I shall retire from politics. It is your turn now, you of the younger generation."

"But can you bear not to be in the forefront of affairs any longer, Father?"

"Yes, my son, I can. I shall paint. That, too, is fighting against war. Believe me, an artist is just as much use in the world as a diplomatist. And a good artist is considerably more useful than a bad diplomatist. I hope you will become a good diplomat."

"I must tell you something, Father. I have little liking for public affairs. Of course, I shall study here as long as you wish me to. But I should really like to live quietly in the country like your friend Peiresc. I should love to become an archaeologist."

"I shall not think of opposing your plans, my son. To live in the country, comfortably and quietly, and interest oneself in archaeology is a very fine life. What news of your collection? Have you picked up anything interesting lately?"

"I have two fine Roman coins. Will you come along with me and help me to decipher the inscriptions?"

Albrecht had furnished comfortably and neatly his small quarters in the palace. Pieter loved to visit him. The two would talk for hours, especially on archaeology, on which subject Albrecht had almost an expert's knowledge. He had already acquired a small but good collection, inheriting this passion from his father. Pieter, indeed, was so content to be at his son's side that he felt he had two homes, one in Antwerp and one in Albrecht's quarters in Brussels. There was nothing to disturb the intimate relations between them. They often spoke of Bella. Albrecht would inquire politely about Helen and little Clara, but that done, would never again refer to the inmates of the house at Antwerp.

At home in Antwerp, Helen bore her second child, which to her unbounded delight was a boy. This time she wanted the christening to be as impressive as possible, and insisted on choosing the godparents herself. She selected the Marquis D'Aytona and one of Isabella's ladies-in-waiting, who accordingly visited Antwerp and attended the christening in the St. James's Church. Helen's second confinement passed smoothly, and six days after the child was born she was up and about again. Though a little pale, she greeted the guests with bubbling gaiety. After the ceremony tables were laid for two hundred guests in the garden. As it was July and unbearably hot, the banquet would have been a tedious affair if held indoors. But under the trees in the garden and fanned by a light breeze from the Scheldt everyone was happy. There were many hostesses: all Helen's married sisters, Bella's younger sister, Philips's widow, all under the command of Mevrouws Brant and Fourment. During the afternoon, Pieter sent for an orchestra, and couples started dancing on the smooth stones of the courtyard, watched by many townspeople through cracks in the garden fence. The guests were enjoying themselves so much that many showed no inclination to go home. At dusk there were still several groups of people in the garden. Pieter busied himself with everything and proved himself an excellent host. He sent Helen off to rest in the early afternoon and would not let her get up again till dusk, when she was in time to say good-by to the guests.

After Pieter had left the last guest at the gate, he went upstairs to see Helen. But he could not find her anywhere. The new baby and Clara were already asleep, and the nurse did not know the whereabouts of her mistress. A servant he met on the stairs, however, informed him that Her Excellency, after putting the little one to sleep, had returned to the garden. Pieter again went into the garden, and soon he heard Helen's gay laughter and the deeper tones of a man's voice. He recognized the male voice at once: the man was Don Rodrigo, Marquis D'Aytona's aide-de-camp. For a moment he remembered his old resolve never to allow himself to be swept away by jealousy. He must not try to overhear what these two were talking about. He must call out to them as soon as possible. But something prevented him from calling out, and, as he was walking now not on gravel but on grass, his footfalls were muffled. Involuntarily he stopped.

"On the contrary," Don Rodrigo was saying, "I respect your husband greatly, indeed as if he were my own father."

"That would make me your mother, Don Rodrigo."

"That is more difficult to imagine, *señora*. Everyone is older than you, especially your husband."

"Don't keep on referring to my husband's age. He is a fit rival for any of you."

The male voice became soft and insinuating.

"In every respect?"

The feminine voice took on the same tone.

"In every respect. When he embraces me, he almost breaks my ribs. I tell you he is at least your equal in love."

"I cannot understand how you can be so certain of it, *señora*. What opportunities have you had to make comparisons? If you are so convinced of your husband's vitality, you must have deceived."

Pieter felt his throat dry and his knees trembling. He strained his ears to catch the answer.

"You have drunk a great deal, Don Rodrigo," she said, very softly. "I have never deceived him, nor shall I ever do so."

Now the male voice became serious, appealing, intimate.

"Are you so happy? Is your life so perfect? Answer me seriously, for I ask you seriously."

"You shall have a serious answer. Sometimes I miss the companionship of young people who can laugh for no reason and be gay without cause. I'd sometimes like to romp with young men—oh, quite innocently, don't misunderstand me—but these impulses are very rare. I am afraid that you, all of you, must resign yourselves to the fact that I am a happy and contented woman. . . . But now it's time to look for the others. We have quite forgotten ourselves here."

They rose, and Pieter was just going to hail Helen joyously, when Don Rodrigo spoke again.

"One thing more, *señora*. Your husband is often away traveling, while I am frequently in Antwerp. Would you be displeased if I were to pay my respects to you at such times?"

"If you are so foolish as to make such suggestions to me beforehand, I cannot receive you. You are very clumsy, Don Rodrigo."

She laughed again and set her face toward the house. Pieter called out quickly as if he had just arrived.

"Helen! Where are you? Helen! Is that you?"

They emerged from the arbor.

"I am here, dear. Where are the others?"

"They're all gone. I've just been up to the nursery and heard that you had fed the baby. It's sleeping soundly now."

"My God, what a bad mother I am. But at least a good hostess. I have been entertaining Don Rodrigo here in the arbor."

"That was right. One must honor welcome guests. You like my garden, Don Rodrigo?"

"It is lovely, *señor*. And the flowers are all of exquisite beauty."

"Yes. But there are thieves after them. And I have no inclination to give up anything of mine. I'm going to devote one of my evenings to setting a trap. Anyone who tries to steal flowers from my garden will get a bullet through him instead. Or I might even tackle him with my bare fists and throttle the life out of him. . . . This is the best way out, Don Rodrigo. . . ."

The officer looked startled. He did not know whether his hostess was giving him a hint or not. After he had taken a rather hurried leave, Pieter escorted Helen back to the house.

"Well, that's that," he said. "Everything was perfect. Aren't you tired? I didn't like your getting up again. But if you have enjoyed yourself, it was worth while. What kind of fellow is this Don Rodrigo? I must admit that he is very handsome."

"Oh, never mind him. He's just a young fop. Too young. You know I don't like young people—I don't much care for talking to them. They talk such nonsense and laugh for no reason."

This light comment hurt Pieter deeply. Helen was not thinking of flitting with other men, but she was telling a lie. Perhaps from tact and consideration—still, it was a lie. And she had been flirting. She did not forbid the proposed underhand visit of the handsome officer as roundly as she should have done.

"You didn't tell me," Helen remarked, "that thieves were after the flowers."

"Don't worry about it, dear. Perhaps they only meant to steal one or two. But you know I can be depended on to guard my belongings. Now

I hope you'll go to bed at once. I am very much afraid that this tiresome afternoon has been too much for you. I'm tired, too. Have you seen Nicolaas?"

"No, I think he's studying."

When Pieter put out the light, the moon shone brilliantly through the square of the open window. He stood brooding with his eyes open, running over in his mind the sentences he had overheard. "When he embraces me, he almost breaks my ribs." How could a distinguished lady talk in such a manner to a strange young man about the intimate details of her married life? And then, why did she lie about her feelings, no matter whether she hankered after young company or not? If she did it out of tact, then she thought him an old man needing to be humored. And this, too, was a painful thought. And, if she lied to deceive him, it was even more distressing. "You are very clumsy, Don Rodrigo." Which meant: You might be more skillful. This woman was already considering the skill or clumsiness of her cavaliers. Her remark was painfully suggestive. If the husband were away, the suitor should be skillful, not announcing his visit beforehand, because then she will refuse to receive him, but arriving innocently as if he did not know that the master of the house were absent. . . . This was more than simple coquetry. It was a furtive invitation to intrigue. No, he must settle this. He got out of bed and, sitting on the edge, wondered whether he should have it out with Helen, who had moved for a few weeks after the child's birth to another room. Perhaps she was not yet asleep. But how would she react to such an accusation? Was it wise to mention the matter at all? It was said that a jealous husband usually fixed his wife's thoughts on some man whom she would otherwise never have considered seriously. It was also humiliating for him to show that he was afraid of such a foppish young officer. Perhaps it would be wiser not to speak. As he sat hesitating on the edge of the bed he suddenly slapped his own forehead. Here was he, sober and much-traveled man, sitting brooding over puerilities, the very prototype of the imbecile old husband who made himself ridiculous through jealousy. No, he must put a stop to this. Quickly and violently he swore by the Blessed Virgin that he would not go to Helen now. Later, perhaps, he might drop some remark which would put Helen off receiving Don Rodrigo ever again. He went back to bed defiantly and began immediately to argue

little profit, but it was enjoyable and instructive. Now the Augsburg master was working on a terra-cotta bust of Pieter. They discussed art and artists, and Petel mentioned Velasquez; Pieter described his own contacts with the famous painter and the fight Spanish artists were waging against the authorities who squeezed their profits out of them. He told Petel of a book about Spanish art by Carduccio, a Florentine, written with a strong bias against Velasquez and those painters who imitated nature. He found the book and quoted from it.

"These imitators of nature know their weaknesses and therefore show ingenious cunning in avoiding their real task. If, for example, they are supposed to represent the visit of Jesus to Mary and Martha, they paint huge piles of food, capons, calves, fruit, pheasants, in order to let it appear that they are imitating nature. I abhor these painters who prostitute their spirits and their hands to representation of this kind."

"Wait a moment. Now he comes to Teniers and the Dutch."

"Naturally there are subjects well suited to such painters. They paint kitchens, drunkards, and gamblers—and all these from the basest and most vulgar standpoint. The spirit of the artist is wasted in painting on his canvas four loathsome fellows and two loose women to the detriment of art."

"Now here he is on Velasquez, Van Dyck, and myself."

"Then there is portrait painting, which is really supposed to imitate nature. But it is a subordinate kind of art. No truly great artist is ever portrait painter, because the great artist corrects and improves upon nature, while the portrait must be the slave of his subject."

"... So you see, Petel, when you are doing that bust of me you are not a real artist."

"It is a most amusing book. But how can an Italian who lives in Spain write such good German?"

"He wrote it in Spanish, not in German. I translated it as I read."

"What? Is it possible?"

"Don't forget that it's a book I know very well. . . . But what really interests me is that the author classes Velasquez and myself together, although there is absolutely nothing in common between us—except that we both approach our art from an entirely new angle. But his conceits won't make any difference to me or you or Van Dyck, who is, in my opinion, the best portrait painter in the world."

"Have you heard from him? How is he getting on in London?"

"Excellently. King Charles is very fond of him and often visits him in Blackfriars, where he has a wonderful studio fitted up for him. He's much patronized by the nobility, though not necessarily to have their portraits painted. His studio has become the most fashionable meeting place in London. Anthony keeps six footmen and dresses more expensively than any of his noble visitors. He usually invites his subjects to dine with him, and entertains them royally. His table and wines seem to be the talk of the town. But he can well afford it. Money is flowing into his studio. The English nobles have adopted the habit of ordering not one portrait but several, showing themselves in different poses and attitudes. The Earl of Stratford has had himself painted nine times, the Earl of Arundel seven. I have painted this Arundel, too, but only twice."

"Van Dyck is an interesting man, but I think his way of life is bad for him. He has not a strong constitution. I have warned him often not to stay up so late at night because he would live to rue it, but he just laughed."

"Yes, that's the one thing I was never able to teach him: how to take care of himself. I always say that he's like Achilles: he wants a short life and a merry one. And how he can enjoy himself! When he tastes wine, he closes his eyes in ecstasy, and when he sees a fine ruff his eyes fill with tears."

"I can imagine what devastation he causes among the women."

"That shouldn't be difficult in London nowadays. The ladies of fashion are extremely profligate. Anthony has had one grand love affair. He became the intimate friend of the Earl of Bristol and then proceeded to seduce his wife, the Lady Venetia Digby."

"So I have heard. I believe he also painted her."

"Several times. Indeed so many times that the frequent sittings became a court scandal. Anthony retaliated by painting her with the conquered monster of slander beneath her feet and the dove of innocence on her wrist. Apparently he did this chiefly to reassure the husband. Lady Venetia died recently, and he painted her on the bier. But I hear that the picture he painted to deceive the husband is the better of the two. . . . Let's stop now, Petel."

"What is the matter? You have suddenly turned quite nervous."

"It is nothing. I really enjoy discussing art. We'll go on again tomorrow."

row, shan't we, sticking as usual to our resolve not to talk politics?" Indeed Pieter now avoided discussing politics with everyone except old Brant, whom he trusted completely. He seldom went to Brussels, and then only to see Albrecht. He refrained from calling on the Archduchess. In any case Isabella gave very few audiences, as nowadays she spent more time in bed than out of it. But on one occasion when he was visiting Brussels, Pieter received a message from her, saying that she had heard he was in Brussels and wished to see him. He was shown into her bedchamber. She looked terribly aged. Her disease had turned into jaundice, and the whites of her eyes were a sickly yellow. She talked with difficulty and sometimes groaned in pain.

"Are you still keeping out of politics, Rubens?"

"Yes, Your Highness, I live now only for my art and my family."

"So you have achieved a certain serenity I haven't. I still find it impossible to retire to my nursery, because of the States General. It is too late now, in any case. . . . However, I wanted to tell you something about the Duke of Aarschot which will interest you. My observer reported suspicious things of him, and there were indications that he was in league with your friend Gerbier. Aarschot conducted affairs to the point of being ready to submit the negotiations to Olivarez for final approval, and I was completely ignored in the matter. He even left for Madrid without paying his respects. I then took steps to discover if this Gerbier could not be made to talk."

"Such an attempt would hardly be likely to succeed, Your Highness." "You are mistaken. Gerbier has suffered considerable financial losses, and he is a family man. He has received a lump sum of twenty thousand talers and an annuity for life. A lot of money, but it was well spent. Your friend Gerbier has described in the greatest detail how the noble-men sent from Brussels organized a conspiracy against me. The whole intrigue was discussed in his lodgings, and he supplied me with ample proof. That fool Aarschot went to Madrid at exactly the right time—for me. I wrote to the King, telling him of the conspiracy. I have just received the news that Aarschot has been arrested in Madrid, and I can assure you that he will never leave prison. I have also taken steps to have the ring-leaders here at home arrested. So if Aarschot insulted you, a knight, a nobleman, and a chamberlain, you have now received satis-

faction. I wanted to tell you this . . . and I also wanted to say good-by to you."

"What do you mean? How can you say such things, Your Highness?" "I know well what I am saying, Rubens. We shall never see each other again. Thank you for your loyalty and friendship. And you are the only great help and comfort to me in this difficult life. And you are the only real friend I have left. Do not say anything. Keep silent. . . . I tell you, I have really quitted life already. My soul is already on the other side. I go with peace and joy. God bless you, and farewell."

Pieter obeyed. He kissed her hand silently. From the door he glanced back, but the Infanta was no longer looking at him. She was grasping her crucifix firmly and praying with closed eyes. A few days later, in the afternoon, all the bells in Antwerp began to toll. The Archduchess was dead.

"Visit me? Why do you ask such strange things?"

you? Did he ever promise to visit you?"

"What do you mean? Was there ever any question of his neglecting

in a week."

but if she does not respond to him at once he will be neglecting her

"Yes," she replied with indifference. "Now he is besieging her violently,

woman?" Pieter asked Helen when they were home again.

"Did you see how infatuated Don Rodrigo seemed with that dark-eyed

reception.

lady who had come with her husband from Brussels to attend the reception. D'Aytoua's aide-de-camp. Don Rodrigo was desperately courting a dark plainly elsewhere. He seemed particularly interested in the Marquis to him. Olivarez made a few polite but trifling remarks; his attention was Pieter met him again at the ceremonial reception and introduced Helen to consider this a mark of favor. Olivarez visited Antwerp later, and sign of regret; on the other hand he was not rude, and Pieter felt inclined that he himself had retired from politics. Olivarez heard this with no mended his son to the attention of the all-powerful Duke, but announced paid his respects at once, but the audience was a short one. He recommended himself and give his personal attention to all details, no matter how insignificant. In spite of this his decisions were as belated as ever. Pieter took over affairs with his usual thoroughness. He wanted to see everyone received with such pomp as was compatible with court mourning. He was ordinary circumstances, and one day Olivarez himself arrived. He was apparently he was not considered adequate, having regard to the extraordinary Cardinal, had not yet arrived to take over his new post, so the Prince Cardinal, had not yet arrived to take over his new post, so the the news of the arrest of several prominent noblemen. Fernando, the were still sitting in Brussels, and the people generally were agitated by tion of peace with Holland was still open. The Flemish States General Thus the Governor's palace was vacant just at the time when the ques-

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"Because he besieged you violently at the christening."

"That may be. I don't remember. But there was no mention of his

paying me visits."

"If you don't remember that he paid you court, how can you remember that there was no question of his visiting you?"

"Pieter, you're jealous!" Helen laughed. "How happy I am! I have always been vexed that you showed no sign of it; I thought that you did not really love me. Now I see that you, too, can be jealous. . . . Oh, I am happy!"

"You are mistaken—I am not jealous. If I were, these speculations of mine would be an insult to you. And I want to respect you."

"You see, you're spoiling all my satisfaction. It made me so happy to think that you love me and are jealous. It might be worth your while to be jealous. This Don Rodrigo said many flattering things to me."

"Oh. Now your memory has come back. What did he say?"

"It was just a joke. I really don't remember."

Pieter grabbed her wrist. He was filled with sudden anger.

"Tell me at once what he said."

"Ouch, you've bruised my hand," Helen complained, but she was still laughing. "After all, you *can* be jealous. It's such a great delight to feel that. Do let me enjoy it—even if you don't really suspect me. I like it very much."

"Why?"

"Because I can tell everybody in the family: 'Pieter is so jealous—it's terrible.' And then they envy me."

"You are really a child. I think nothing delights you so much as the envy of others."

"Of course I enjoy being envied. If only you had seen how other women looked at me today when I was speaking to the Duke of Olivarez. He is a pleasant man, too."

"I knew you would say that. For you, dukes are always pleasant people." "Of course they are, and I love talking to them. Is there any harm in that?"

"No. But what I want to know are the things Don Rodrigo said to you."

"I really don't remember, except that he made me laugh and paid me compliments—as men usually do."

"What do you mean 'as men usually do'? It has never been my habit at any rate to lay siege to a beautiful woman as soon as I am left alone with her."

"Really? Not even when you were young?"

"I am not exactly an ancient," Pieter replied, a little irritated. "But I didn't do it even when I was younger."

"Well, everyone tries to flirt with me, and I love it. And I love to tell my sisters about it and have a good laugh at men."

"I must take your education in hand, Helen. A woman of distinction takes no notice of such advances, and checks them at once—you must realize that. And I don't want to tell you that ever again."

"Really, you grudge me every little pleasure," said Helen in a broken voice. And then she burst into tears. "I didn't think it would be like this."

Pieter took her chin and turned her face toward him.

"What, do you mean being married to me? You astound me, Helen. Haven't you got all you want? You have money, jewels, a carriage with a coat of arms, and God has blessed you with two fine children. What did you imagine married life would be like?"

"I know I have all that. But I thought after we were married you would take me often to Brussels, where there would be state balls, and I hoped we should even move to Brussels and have a fine big house there. And I thought men would admire me, because, no matter what you say, a woman needs to know that she is admired. I thought you would take me to England or to Venice. But I haven't been to a single ball at Court and we have never gone traveling. For weeks I speak to no one but my own family. . . . I am horribly bored, Pieter. And, if someone pays me innocent compliments, you grudge me even that."

"Where do you think of finding state balls, Helen? If that was the only reason you married me, you needn't have bothered, because you might have known that the Archduchess was a nun and never gave a ball of any kind. As for parties—you know well enough that my work takes up all my time. And don't complain that you don't meet distinguished people; two royal ladies have visited the house. What more do you want? I cannot collect all the crowned heads of Europe here for luncheon. As for travel—we shall travel when I find it necessary to do so. And as for being admired by men, in my opinion your husband's admiration should be

sufficient. If you are bored, the fault lies with yourself alone. Helen, you ought to be slapped. I shall be really angry until you have apologized. And now I am going to work."

Her sulks lasted only until evening. When they went to bed, Pieter was still angry, but in the darkness he felt two plump arms twine around him, and Helen snuggled close like a contented kitten. She apologized humbly, and in the warmth of their embraces Pieter forgave her everything.

Life again took on an even tenor. Pieter worked continuously and was fortunate about this time in finding a very useful young man for the studio. His name was Erasmus Quellyn, a master of arts, extraordinarily skillful in drawing and engraving. Among the other collaborators young Frans Wouters showed considerable promise, being particularly adept in painting small figures and landscapes. Of the new pupils Abraham Diepenbeck was the most talented; his brushwork was confident and delicate. But the greatest asset to Pieter was Cornelis Schut, who had had his own studio until the war made his position difficult, when he had joined Rubens to earn bread for his family. The new team of collaborators was not individually as talented as that of former years, but Pieter was able to induce each man to give of his best. The studio had now been a going concern for twenty-four years; the order books numbered several volumes and contained records of over two thousand pictures. The pace of working had not appreciably slackened; indeed, since giving up his political work, Pieter was able to devote more time to the studio than previously, and he did not lack clients. The Whitehall panels provided continuous work unless some particularly urgent commission turned up.

The most interesting of these new commissions came from the Abbey of Effingham, which required a painting of the Savior at the very moment he was collapsing under the burden of the Cross. Pieter decided to compose his picture round a dark centerpiece, Jesus clad in a dark robe, surrounded by carefully arranged figures in white: Veronica with her white face and white kerchief, the white flanks of the centurion's horse, a mother holding her babe aloft, the muscular legs of the executioner's assistant, straining to raise the fallen Cross. Helen was the model for Veronica; she offered the white kerchief to the bleeding and sweating Jesus. Pieter took pains to please her. He gave her small gifts, complimented her on

the way she dressed her hair, and bought a new hat for her without consulting her beforehand. Once while he was working he asked her: "What could I get you that would give you the greatest pleasure?"

"I'd like to have a tulip bulb."

Pieter smiled and nodded; he was prepared for such a request. Nowa-

days at every social gathering nobody talked of anything else but tulips. The tulip craze in Holland had reached Flanders. No one knew how it had started. Last year, when the tulip had been brought from India, it had excited little attention. But this year it was the staple topic of conversation. The inns of the Dutch cities became tulip exchanges. Travelers returning to Flanders from Holland said that this passion for tulips was a madness that had seized the whole nation. There was no social class that did not speculate in tulips. Noblemen bargained with chimney sweeps, serving wenches with great merchants. The bulbs were sold according to weight and at certain set dates. The fisherman knew as well as the town councillor that a parcel of Viceroy bulbs stood at three thousand guilders, or that a parcel of Semper Augustus would fetch five thousand five hundred. If a man had no money, he pledged his home, his cattle, his clothing against consignments of bulbs. Some men grew rich in a very short time, some lost everything they possessed in the world. Haarlem was especially notorious for the tulip craze. The fever had now reached Antwerp, and, of course, Helen was desperately anxious to have a bulb. Pieter got her one for which he paid seven hundred and fifty guilders. It was a General Lieffken. When he unwrapped it carefully and handed it to her, Helen looked startled and disappointed.

"Is this a tulip bulb? Why, it looks like an ordinary onion. I thought. . . Well, I don't quite know what I thought."

"Don't be silly, Helen. Do you know I gave seven hundred and fifty guilders for this bulb? Now you must be pleased with it or I shall be cross."

"But I can't be thrilled about it at all. I tell you, Pieter, I didn't think it would look in the least like this."

So they quarreled again and hardly spoke to each other for two days. Then Helen's mother came to make peace.

"You don't handle her in the right way, Pieter. Although she has two children, she's barely twenty. You talk to her as if she were forty. You

demand maturity from her, and that is a quality she certainly does not possess."

"That isn't the point," Pieter answered gloomily. "The truth is that Helen doesn't really love me. Nothing pleases her. If she loved me and I gave her a wayside flower, she would be delighted with it and love me more. But she is horribly spoiled. Everything I do is wasted on her."

"Yes, she was the youngest daughter and the most beautiful. She was everybody's darling. But it's not too late to train her, although I've failed to do it. First of all, you should speak kindly to her. She has been crying the whole day and complaining that you are making a fuss about a silly bulb. Let her have the bulb again."

"I can't do that. I have already sold it for one thousand and fifty guilders. And Helen is not to send ambassadors to me; let her come herself and apologize, not particularly because of the bulb, but because she was rude and ungracious."

But Helen made no apology that day. She cunningly postponed it till the evening. This time, however, he disengaged himself from the arms that twined round his neck. Helen cried for a long time at his side, but he made no effort to comfort her. Next morning she apologized most humbly. She also told him how much she loved him—on the advice of her mother. Pieter suspected. But he did not trouble to investigate that. When she nestled against him and told him how unhappy she had been because he had not wanted her the previous night, he felt that everything was mended. He bought her back the bulb for one thousand one hundred guilders, and Helen showed becoming delight. But two weeks later she could not produce it when asked.

Pieter slowly began to feel that he was losing his joy in her. This vain, arrogant woman who thought of nothing but the pleasures of fashionable society grew more and more alien to him, but, on the other hand, her desirable young body became ever more desirable. He felt dimly that he was getting deeper and deeper into the mire.

That summer he finished the Whitehall panels. He had promised the King that he would take them in person to London and superintend the mounting of them into position. But Van Dyck arrived in Antwerp on a vacation, and told him that the King was seriously embarrassed financially and would be unable to defray even the cost of transport. Pieter therefore decided not to go to London, and, because the children were too young

to be left without a mother, and because Helen's dearest wish was to visit London, he was not sorry that the journey had to be postponed. He put the Whitehall pictures aside. For another reason, too, it was fortunate he stayed at home; his old enemy, gout, again attacked him more severely and painfully than ever. Nor did the trouble pass in a few days this time. He was in bed for weeks and when at last he got up, he limped. By this time there were persistent rumors that Fernando, having received permission from the Pope to relinquish his cardinal's hat, was preparing to take up his duties as Governor of the Spanish Netherlands—he was only waiting to take part in some victorious battle which, it was deemed, would make him a suitable Governor for a state at war with Holland. And an opportunity to participate in a victorious battle was not long in coming. The Viennese government had had Wallenstein assassinated because he was anxious to conclude a separate peace, and the murderers had been loaded with rewards and distinctions. The Emperor's son, Ferdinand, King of Hungary, took General Gallas, one of Wallenstein's murderers, as his second-in-command. Ferdinand's imperial army now united with a body of Spanish mercenaries led by Prince Fernando. The Swedes, who had had no real leaders since the death of Gustavus Adolphus, were commanded by Bernhard, Prince of Weimar, and the Swedish Horn. The Swedish and Hapsburg armies met at Nördlingen, and the Catholic side won a signal victory.

One month later Fernando made a ceremonial entry into Brussels. It had been intended to give him a brilliant reception, but in view of the shortness of time, little had been done to prepare for it. Pieter did not go to this festival as he was still feeling far from well; Helen, too, was expecting her third child. The Antwerp Town Council decided to outdo the Brussels reception in every respect and somehow scraped together thirty-six thousand guilders to meet the cost. It was decided to put Pieter in charge of arrangements and give him a fee of five thousand guilders.

"Do you think you can arrange something really splendid?" asked Rockox when they met for the first time to discuss the matter. "I mean to stage a spectacle that Antwerp has never seen before and that will be remembered for a hundred years. But I don't know whether the money will be enough."

"It will be difficult to provide more. We only raised the thirty-six thou-

sand guilders by taxing beer. Even that was not enough, and I had to contribute eight thousand guilders from my own pocket."

"How much time have I?"

"About two months. The ceremonial entry will take place in the middle of January. Have you any definite ideas yet of what you want to do?"

"First of all I must know the route; then I shall dispose the various spectacles along this route; triumphal arches, stages with tableaux. There will be symmetrical and decorated carriages in the procession. But we must not only show joy and happiness, Nicolaas. When we receive the Governor we must not let him think that we have no troubles at all. We must let him know how empty the Scheldt is of shipping, how much our commerce has been ruined. What do you think of that idea?"

Rockox seemed impressed and promised to let him have the route the next day. Pieter did, indeed, get the route, but not for four days, as the town councilors quarreled over it. After studying it carefully, he decided to have four triumphal arches and four stages, while in the Sea Square the statues of twelve Hapsburg emperors would be erected. The Portuguese undertook to pay for one of the triumphal arches, and Pieter now hoped that the money would be sufficient.

The studio was turned into an office where city clerks busied themselves with lists, memoranda, and estimates. Pieter sent for one painter or sculptor after another, Van Dyck being the first. But Anthony said he was on holiday and that the budget for the whole ceremony was so little that it would not be worth his while to undertake any commission.

"Very good," said Pieter. "You must, of course, look after your own interests. You will see the whole show as a spectator."

"Forgive me, but I hate triumphal arches. They give me a headache."

"Just the same old Anthony. All right, don't look at them."

Snijders also found the remuneration inadequate, but with several other artists he was able to strike bargains. Twenty-two major painters, five sculptors, and scores of lesser artists shared in the work.

This work had to be carried out in the coldest winter Pieter had ever experienced. There was a general shortage of fuel, water froze in the washbasins, and it was reported that in the country wild beasts had become so tame that they came into the farmyards and that stags were captured without showing any resistance and led into the stables. Traffic was unable to move, and sometimes even the post did not get through

the snowdrifts. The Prince's entry into the city had therefore to be postponed for a few weeks and was fixed for the third of February. The army of bricklayers, carpenters, paperhangers, stone masons, carters, painters, sculptors, upholsterers was thus given an extra fortnight to complete its tasks.

Van Dyck watched all the preparations from a distance. He did not wait for the ceremony itself, however, and some days before it was due came to Pieter to take his leave.

"I am sailing for London as soon as the weather permits. I want to settle there permanently."

"But I hope you won't sever all your ties with Flanders."

"I have bought a mortgage here at home."

"That was a wise thing to do. Did you get good terms?"

"Quite satisfactory. I discovered a large estate at Steen which is in need of capital; I felt I could invest my money in it with advantage. If I ever happened to get some more money, I might even consider buying it. I visited it in the autumn; the castle is very fine. It has always been my dream to retire to such a castle in my old age. But for the time being I cannot forsake court life. Besides, I am happy in London. I have a comfortable house in Blackfriars, another one on the Thames, many good friends, and the personal good will of the King, who, incidentally, often speaks of you in the warmest terms."

"I am glad to hear it. He was always kind to me. I hope that he will soon be solvent again."

"I'll look after that for you. As soon as I hear that he has some money, I'll write to you."

Van Dyck had implanted an idea in Pieter's mind to which he found himself constantly returning. How good it would be to leave the noisy town and retire with his family to the peace of the country! Beckeren was hardly suitable for this purpose, as the house was quite small and there was no space to build the kind of dwelling he had in mind. He decided to look over the estate at Steen as soon as he could spare the time. Meanwhile, the preparations for the pageant fully occupied him. He had himself to do much of the painting. His greatest task was to paint for one of the triumphal arches the meeting of the Infante and the King of Hungary on the battlefield of Nördlingen. He set Fernando and Ferdinand in the center of the composition, shaking hands on the battlefield.

In the foreground he placed a symbolical figure of the Danube prophesying victory to the genius of Spain and of the Holy Roman Empire. The genius of Spain had Helen's face. He then painted a picture he called *Quos Ego*, in which Neptune was quelling a storm at sea seated in a carriage of shells surrounded by mermaids and sea horses. This picture symbolized a voyage Fernando had made during which his ship seemed certain to be wrecked in a violent storm. However, when all seemed lost, the hurricane had suddenly abated. He also had to paint the portraits of the Archduchess Isabella and Archduke Albrecht. But it was a hundred times more exhausting to supervise a score of painters and sculptors, walk the route of the procession every day, and make sure that the materials supplied by the various contractors were up to standard. It fell to him to devise the tableaux, make researches for the statues of the Hapsburg emperors, supply ideas for the decorations of the carriages in the procession, and design costumes. He composed the couplets to describe the various scenes, statues, and tableaux. All this gave him an immense amount of work. And his difficulties were increased by the slowness of the workmen, the delays of the contractors in delivering materials, foreseen and unforeseen hitches of all kinds. Only a week now remained, and Pieter reckoned that if he worked day and night with shifts of workmen everything would be just about ready by the last moment. Then came news of yet another postponement, a much longer one this time, setting the day for the Prince's entry into Antwerp as the twelfth of April. There was thus no need for hurry, but the financial question now became pressing. The sum of thirty-six thousand guilders had been exceeded long ago, and the two postponements had necessarily caused additional expense. The town councilors, however, refused to forego a single triumphal arch or tableau and closed their eyes to the mounting deficit.

Soon the first signs of spring appeared, and the work became much more pleasant in consequence of the warmer weather. Pieter now found time to go and inspect the estate at Steen, in which Van Dyck had an interest. He did not mention the matter to Helen, partly because if she saw it and liked it she would insist on his buying it without regard to its price, advantages, or disadvantages; partly because if he found the place satisfactory he wanted to surprise her. The castle at Steen was between Mechlin and Vilvoorde, a little off the high road. The local countryside was quite flat, with solitary trees here and there and occasional copses on

the horizon. The castle itself was like a forgotten dream from the age of chivalry. Many centuries ago it had been the home of a baron, and one could easily imagine a knight in shining armor riding out through the gate. The sun gleamed on the tiled roof and shone on the windows of the low, single-storied gatehouse. Close beside the main building was a tower, which might at some time have been connected with the castle proper. Around the castle clustered the white walls of the farm buildings, and the air was filled with the humming of insects and the tinkle of sheep's bells. Pieter jumped down from the saddle at the small gate. When he tried to draw the rusty old bolt, it would not yield, so, leading his horse by the bridle, he went round the building, trying to find an open window. As he walked, he saw traces of the filled-in moat and the vanished drawbridge. There was nowhere a soul to be seen, and he made his way toward the outbuildings. Here at last he found an old woman hanging up a clothes-line between two trees. It was difficult to talk to her, for she was very deaf and slow-witted. She didn't know to whom the castle belonged, but she told him that the bailiff was a certain lawyer in Mechlin. She was quite unable to tell him the number of rooms.

After finding out everything the old woman knew about the place, Pieter rode back to Mechlin. He had made up his mind to buy it, and he had already decided to lay out a park on one side. He saw his children running about on the lawns, he pictured himself reading in the fine library. He saw his coat of arms carved in marble over the gate; he decided to keep a pony cart besides the carriage, and with Helen and the children he saw himself taking a drive on fine forenoons.

At the lawyer's office he said at first only that he was considering taking out a mortgage, perhaps a small one, on the castle. The lawyer found his offer unsatisfactory, but Pieter for his part discovered that the castle was disputed by rival heirs, that it was uninhabited, and that it was already heavily mortgaged. He also learned that if it were taken over free of debt, it could be made self-supporting, as the farm could be let at four thousand guilders a year, while there was some additional land that the owner could farm himself, besides a small forest and several small lakes. Soon the plan of the estate was on the table, and the lawyer was complaining how difficult it was in this warlike world to find a purchaser for such a large property.

"You will indeed find it difficult to secure a buyer, Mynheer," echoed Pieter. "Such estates today fetch ridiculously low prices."

"I would sell it for a ridiculous price—if only to get rid of it."

"I don't think you will succeed. What is that ridiculous price?"

"Well, sir, the estate, together with the castle, has been valued at one hundred and sixty thousand guilders. I would sell it at once for a hundred and twenty."

"Who can afford so much today? A sum like that could hardly be suggested seriously as a rock bottom figure."

The lawyer was, however, clearly interested in the prospect of a buyer, and inside half an hour he had showed Pieter the details of the mortgages, the accounts of the farm, and indeed all financial details connected with the estate. After some discussion it was agreed that Pieter should stay overnight in Mechlin and inspect the interior of the castle, in the company of the lawyer, on the morrow.

There were fine old pieces of furniture in the castle, many of them quite usable, some splendid Flemish tapestries, excellent suits of armor, and many other things. It was a spacious place, with twelve well-designed rooms and a baronial hall on the first floor which, by changing a few windows, could easily be turned into a studio.

"It's too big for me," said Pieter at last. "If I decided to buy a place in the country, I should not be prepared to give more than seventy thousand guilders."

"Seventy thousand guilders, for this estate *and* the castle? You can't be serious, Your Excellency," said the lawyer agast.

"Of course not. I was not referring to this particular place. If you hear of any suitable house at about seventy thousand guilders, write to me in Antwerp."

"Very good, sir. And what about the mortgage?"

"I have changed my mind about that. Forgive me. This Steen estate is in rather a mess, and I feel disinclined to invest cash in it."

The lawyer was very dismayed when they parted at Mechlin, while Pieter felt like a fisherman with a splendid catch on his line which he had not succeeded in landing.

Once more he refrained from mentioning the matter to Helen. She was already in the seventh month of her pregnancy and was continually bewailing that she would be unable to attend the new Governor's cere-

monial entry into Antwerp. At such times Pieter found it better to remain silent, turning aside and contenting himself with a slightly malicious silent chuckle. He was patiently waiting for the moment when he would be able to hand the purchase contract to her; meanwhile he continued his work on the preparations for the festival.

At last the twelfth of April arrived, and Helen, being in her ninth month, was really quite unable to leave the house. Pieter rose at four and took his ride as was his habit. By the time he had made a last inspection of the route in his carriage, the moment for the parade had arrived. He hurried on foot toward the Imperial Gate to join the waiting dignitaries there. But he had to stop halfway. For days his leg had been giving him trouble, and now the attack of gout smote him in full force. The pain in his knee was so great that he came near to fainting. He leaned breathlessly against a wall and called to a passer-by.

"Do you know me, Mynheer?"

"Of course, Your Excellency. Everyone knows you," the man answered. "Then will you do me a favor? I shall write a note. Please do your utmost to deliver it to Mayor Rockox at the Imperial Gate. I'll give you a special pass to let you through. At least you will have an excellent view of the ceremony. Also, my carriage is just round the corner, and I am quite unable to walk; will you be good enough to call it for me?"

"Gladly, Your Excellency."

Pieter hurriedly scribbled a few lines for Rockox on a page torn from his sketchbook, and also a pass for his friendly succorer. He then waited, biting his lips and pale with suffering, resting clumsily on his left leg. The street was belagged and brilliant with flowers, the crowd expectant and happy. When his carriage came, he had great difficulty in getting in, even with the assistance of the stranger and his coachman; he tripped over his sword and collapsed helplessly on to the seat. By the time he reached home his lip was bleeding, so hard had he bitten it in his agony. He had to be carried upstairs. Helen screamed when she saw him.

"Don't be alarmed," Pieter moaned. "It is only one of my attacks of gout. It will pass. Send at once for the doctor to bleed me." While they were undressing him, he ground his teeth. There were terrible stabs of pain in his knee, even if he only turned his head. At last he was able to stretch himself in his bed, and hardly had he done so when the first gun fired in salute. Helen gave orders to have hot bricks prepared

and made preparations for the bleeding. In order to distract himself from the pain, Pieter endeavored to follow in his mind's eye Fernando's advance through the city. He followed him along the beflagged streets, under the triumphal arches, past the tableaux. Right to the monastery, at whose entrance towered the last arch, over which rose a figure—three times larger than life—of Hercules, with Joy and Virtue on either side of him, the whole symbolizing Strength; while Bellerophon, wearing the features of Fernando, was conquering the Chimera. At the door of the monastery priests in their rich robes should be singing in choir. . . . Then the pain overcame him. He fainted.

"Pieter," she cried excitedly, "a court secretary has been here, with a message from the Infante: His Highness is calling on us tomorrow at noon. His Highness in person!"

wakened him. She brought him a brew of poppy seeds to make him sleep, and finally he dozed off, weakened by the loss of blood and exhaustion. But Helen Gevaert left. Helen sat down at the bedside and tried to cheer him up.

"Of course he does. I painted his portrait in Madrid." "My poor friend, it's better to leave you in peace. By the way, His Highness asked three times how you were. He said that he knew you well." "It should have arrived already. The midwife must have made a mistake. Forgive my moaning, but this gout is torturing me. . . ."

"Of course, I know. When do you expect the baby?" the Brants. Nicolaas is staying with them, too." "He wrote to me that he was working hard and that he had already seen the entry into Brussels. I had reserved a place for him—together with last.

"Why didn't your son come over from Brussels?" he asked Pieter at again and again the lavish praise bestowed by the Infante. arrived tired out and almost crying with happiness. He kept quoting gathered once again from all parts of the town. In the evening Gevaert the guidance of Gevaert. The characters in the tableaux were being gram so as to inspect the whole thing once more in the afternoon under umphal arches; he had even decided to upset the rigorously planned program so as to inspect the whole thing once more in the afternoon under could hardly talk of anything but the marvels of the tableaux and tri-wonderful spectacle. Prince Fernando, too, was deeply impressed; he claimed enthusiastically that never before had they witnessed such a the creator of the parade was unable to witness his handiwork. All ex-stant stream, for it had caused a considerable stir throughout the city that him. Early in the afternoon friends and acquaintances arrived in a con-The bleeding lessened the pain somewhat, as the loss of blood weakened

"For God's sake! Have you awakened me up for that? Couldn't it have waited till tomorrow morning?"

"I thought it was important. After all, he is the King's brother. You see, this is just my luck—such an important visitor, and I cannot even show my face."

"Why? A woman should not be ashamed of motherhood—she should be proud of it. You needn't hesitate to show yourself."

"And let him see me in this state? No, I won't. It's really annoying. Couldn't you have had the whole ceremony put off for three weeks? It would only have needed a word from you. But you never think of me." "Helen, I have told you hundreds of times that it simply makes me see red to hear anyone saying: 'It would only have needed a word from you.' People are always tormenting me to say a word for them. It only needs a word from me, of course, and if I can't settle everything then I am a selfish, wicked dog. If you don't want to appear, it doesn't matter. The Infante is staying for some time in Brussels. I am sure there will be state balls, too. But please let me sleep—if I can. You have spoiled my good sleep. And I am in terrible pain again."

"State balls? Oh, how lovely! How splendid! Wait a moment, I'll get some poppy seeds boiled for you again."

He woke next morning with a heavy head and a feeling of nausea. He was fidgeting in bed when the Infante arrived with the Marquis D'Aytona. Prince Fernando had grown a fair mustache which he wore curled and waxed; he was trying to look like a fierce general.

"I must express my great satisfaction to you, Rubens. I have been received in many a city, but I have never seen anything like this. I cannot imagine how you thought of it all. . . ."

"Your Highness, no other city in the world would be able to produce such a display—not one has such a galaxy of painters and sculptors. Antwerp alone could achieve it—Antwerp, which sets such high hopes on Your Highness."

"Its hopes will be justified. I am going to annihilate the Dutch. I shouldn't like to be in the Prince of Orange's shoes. But let us talk about you. I am really sorry to see you suffering."

"It won't last long, Your Highness. Just a passing attack of gout. In any case, I am deeply grateful to Your Highness for honoring my humble home with a visit."

Helen entered at this moment. Her curiosity had proved stronger than her vanity. Her dress was voluminous enough partially to hide her pregnancy. Pieter presented her to Fernando.

"Oh yes, the beautiful Doña Rubens," the Infante said in the tone of a spoiled young man. "I have heard of you, *señora*. I hope that I may be allowed to pay my tribute to your beauty in more becoming circumstances. . . ."

"Oh, Your Highness, all Antwerp is happy to think that court life will revive again in Brussels. We are all looking forward to the new era, the festivals, the balls. . . ."

The young Governor glanced at D'Aytona. Both of them laughed.

"For the time being we have other business in hand, Doña Helena," the Marquis said. "His Highness will spend more time on the battlefield than in the ballroom."

"Well," smiled Prince Fernando, "that's the lot of a rough soldier like myself."

Helen looked rather disconcerted. The Infante turned to Pieter:

"But I hope you will report to me so that we can have a talk. I have been told that you were court painter to my late aunt of blessed memory. It will be a great pleasure to me if you can fill the same position under my regime. Let me finish off the battles first—the arts will flourish better in peacetime. We must hurry now, mustn't we D'Aytona? Let me tell you once more how satisfied I am, Rubens. You have covered your city with glory. I shall never forget this. I hope you recover very soon. Good-by. Good-by, *señora*, I wish you a happy accompaniment. Is it your first child?"

"The third, Your Highness."

"Really. You must have been a child yourself when you married. Well, that's the way of these naughty old satyrs like Rubens. They are quick to pluck the tenderest blossoms. Good-by."

Helen accompanied the guests to the staircase and returned, happily flustered:

"What a pleasant man, isn't he?"

"Quite, but he would be even more pleasant if he wouldn't call a man a naughty old satyr in front of his wife. Lying here in pain and struggling not to swear, I can hardly look the part. His Highness is somewhat impetuous. And he seems to like to play the soldier—though they say he is

a talented leader. God grant him success so that we can keep war from Antwerp. Now leave me alone, my dear. I'd like to fall asleep."

"I wish you could," Helen said, and sat down again at the bedside. "Tell me, will it be long before there are any state balls?"

"There won't be any for some time, but I am sure there will be later on. Now I'd like to sleep."

"Perhaps you will be able to, my poor dear. You have suffered so much. If there is a state ball, shall we get an invitation?"

"Probably. Now I would really like to sleep."

"Tell me only one thing, Pieter. Is the Infante married?"

"As far as I know he isn't—except that he may be married secretly like the Prince of Orléans. If there are any other questions, ask them now, darling, and get them over."

"God forbid that I should disturb you any more; you want to sleep. I'll just give you a kiss."

She left the room with her rather heavy gait. She was carrying a new life which God would call into the world soon—perhaps that very day. No man could be impatient with a woman at such a time. Not even a man who suffered unbearable pain and had little hope of sleep. He merely wanted to be left alone, like a sick animal.

He got up that same day when Helen was taken to child bed. The baby was a girl and they called it Isabella. Between its birth and the christening Pieter put through the acquisition of the Steen estate. He paid ninety-three thousand guilders—approximately the sum which he had received from the Duke of Buckingham for his collection. Steen now belonged to him, but he still kept the purchase a secret—a surprise for Helen.

The Jesuits of Ghent had commissioned him to paint an altarpiece depicting the martyrdom of St. Livinus. It was easy to employ the pretext of a trip to Ghent; but in fact he went to Mechlin, where he engaged some artisans and discussed in detail the interior arrangement of the castle. He had already decided how to divide the rooms. Next to the studio there would be a bedroom, then the nursery, a servant's room, and a bathroom, while on the ground floor there would be a library, a dining room, a parlor; the tower would hold a study and a smaller studio, a chamber each for Nicolaas and Albrecht, and also some guest rooms. There was still space for a smaller parlor in which he could set his collection of pictures and statues. He found a trustworthy man to supervise the

work, and impressed upon him that he had to keep secret his employer's name. Then he returned to Antwerp to work on the martyrdom of St. Livinus for the Jesuits. He found particular pleasure in this subject, and when he had finished it he felt that it was one of the most interesting pictures he had ever painted.

Not for many years had he felt such an uprush of creative power. He had lost count of his commissions. The very day on which he signed the purchase contract of the Steen estate, Richelieu declared war on Spain. In earlier times he would have rushed hot-foot to Brussels, but now he merely reflected with quiet satisfaction that there was no need to fear England; she would not join France, and this immunity was his own personal achievement. After the St. Livinus altarpiece he painted the Massacre of the Innocents, blending horror and the glorification of heavenly bliss on one huge canvas. In the lower part of the picture everything was gory, tumultuous, frightening, while above the stormy scene hovered three winged angels scattering flowers and drawing heavenward the souls of the innocent little new saints.

This large canvas was followed by one of Meleager and Atlanta, two pairs of centaurs in a love scene, the Rape of the Sabines, a stag hunt, and several portraits. Then, thinking of Steen, he painted a distant landscape as the background of a scene from the Odyssey—the scene where Ulysses meets Nausicaa for the first time, the lovely princess playing ball with her companions. His imagination found this an attractive idea: an aging man, having passed through the storms and scaled the heights of life, art, and politics, meets in his wanderings the irresistible image of beauty, youth, and innocence. And he painted once more his own Nausicaa, depicting Helen in her latest dress, wearing her new hat with the ostrich feathers and sitting on a balcony, her first child in her lap. Little Clara was quite naked except for a feathered bonnet on her head. And he was thinking all the time what joy it would be to give Helen her first glimpse of Steen. As they attracted sight-seers, the paraphernalia of the Infante's ceremonial entry were left standing for a month. Then the Town Council decided to have the triumphal arches, statues, and stages dismantled. The oil paintings had been taken down previously; they were to be presented to Prince Fernando, who had expressed a desire to own them. But it was intended to sell the others. After the enthusiasm of the festivals it was a bitter pill to realize that the final budget was twice as big as the original

estimate: that single day had cost Antwerp more than seventy thousand guilders. Rockox tried the stratagem of having the triumphal arches auctioned off—but the first only fetched 429 guilders and 12 stuivers—so it was not worth while to bother with the rest. It was impossible to recover the deficit of forty thousand guilders in this way. And this deficit was, in fact, even increasing. It was decided to publish a memorial album combining the paintings, triumphal arches, and other sights. Van Thulden was to make forty engravings, and Gevaert would contribute a fine learned Latin text. Three special copies would be printed for the Infante with illuminated texts while the city itself was to receive two hundred. Van Thulden was to receive two thousand guilders, Gevaert three thousand six hundred, the illuminator twelve hundred. Thus, the parade would ultimately cost ninety thousand guilders instead of thirty-six. The city had no money: one or two painters and contractors started lawsuits. But the expenditure was generally considered to have been worth while. Such pomp had never before been seen in Antwerp.

On the other hand, Antwerp had now such a fright as it had never experienced since the time of the Duke of Alva. The citizens still remembered the days when they had watched from the church steeples the approach of the Dutch ships along the Scheldt. But this time it was a land army which was coming dangerously near to Antwerp. Upon the French declaration of war the Infante had hurriedly collected an army; and, as he was still occupied in Brussels with the taking over of the governorship, entrusted Thomas, Duke of Savoy, with its leadership. The Duke of Savoy set out at once against the French, who had already entered Luxembourg. The first action of Duke Thomas ended in a painful fiasco. He had attacked the French without any previous reconnaissance; and, after a brief combat the French took all his guns, food, and supply wagons. The Spanish army suddenly melted away. The soldiers scattered; some of them were hiding from the French pursuit in the woods around Antwerp. The French army was following up its triumph. People were terrified, but their fright lasted only a short time. The enemy did not enter Antwerp but made off in a hurry toward Holland, where a second Spanish army was fighting a fierce and protracted battle with the Dutch.

The roads were unsafe, the changing luck of war might move the battle zone at any time toward Mechlin—yet Pieter could hardly wait

to show Steen to Helen. He had visited it several times, always under the pretext of country commissions, to supervise the progress of the workmen. During one of these visits he made an interesting discovery. He asked some local people what village lay in a certain direction from Steen.

"That's Dry Toren," he was told. "Only an hour by foot from here." Dry Toren was the village where Teniers usually spent his summer holidays. Pieter was glad that he would have such a pleasant neighbor, but he also realized that he could not postpone much longer telling Helen, for she might discover his secret from another source. When the French danger had drawn off somewhat and the work had sufficiently progressed, he told her one day:

"Helen, pack your things quickly: I am going for a few days to Mechlin, and I want to take you along."

"My dear, it's impossible. How can I leave a five-months-old baby?"

"Bring her along—and the nurse, too. It's a short journey, and the weather is fine. It's a long time since we had such a lovely September."

"For how long shall I pack?"

"Two or three days."

"They set out in fine autumn weather. The baby was rather troublesome, but Helen quieted it. At Mechlin, Pieter explained to the driver how to make for Eppenheim. Helen asked in surprise:

"Where are we going, Pieter?"

"To a rich landowner who has invited us on a visit. I am working for him. Do you like this landscape? I find it very attractive."

"But who is the landowner?"

"I won't tell you—you'll see. You'll meet his wife, too. She is very beautiful."

"More beautiful than I am?"

"No—but just as beautiful."

Helen did not like this: her spirits were visibly damped. When they passed through the small village of Eppenheim, Pieter showed her the interesting peasant types, the old church, the village inn, but all in vain. She displayed little interest.

"Now you can see the castle—it's called Steen. They live there."

"Oh, what a fine castle," Helen said enviously. "Your acquaintance must be a very distinguished man."

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"So he is. And his wife is both distinguished and beautiful."

"You said that before. I am curious to see her. Of course, she would have a castle like that. All I get is Eeckeren, where one can't even spend a night. Nor do you get any summer holiday. Do they live here all the year round?"

"No, only in summer. They spend the winter in Antwerp."

"Really? Oh, then, I must know them. Pieter, don't tease me—who are they?"

"You'll know in a minute. Here we are. . . ."

They left the carriage in front of the castle. Singing drifted through the windows where the upholsterers were working. Pieter walked ahead: his wife and nurse followed him, with the baby. He turned to the left, into an anteroom which opened on the big dining hall. There was an expensive full-length mirror in this anteroom, and here at last he could realize the surprise he had planned for so many months. He led Helen to the mirror and said with a deep ceremonial bow:

"Most gracious mistress of this castle, let me present to you the prettiest woman in Antwerp who wishes to pay her respects to you in your fine home."

Helen did not grasp it immediately; she was amazed, gazing into the mirror, at her husband, and again into the mirror.

"Pieter. . . . I don't understand this . . . this castle . . . what Antwerp family is it . . . you don't mean that. . . ."

"Yes. I do mean it. I have bought the castle. It's yours—ours. Next spring we can move into it."

She cried out happily:

"This lovely castle is ours? Nurse, do you hear? We must look at it quickly! Oh, I really don't know what to do, I am so happy! Pieter, you're the best man in the world!"

She fell on his neck and kissed him violently. Then she set out on a quick tour of inspection.

"It isn't half finished yet," Pieter explained. "There's great deal we have to move from town. But we can sleep here tonight. Nurse, give the baby to Her Excellency and go to the driver and help him to take the luggage upstairs. Hold the baby, dear: if she's too heavy I'll take care of her. This is the dining room—the table can be lengthened to seat forty people. It will be different here from Antwerp—we shall invite

many guests. There are some nice people in Mechlin, and we must get acquainted with the landowners around us. Teniers is living only an hour from here. There are several lakes on the estate in which we can bathe, but the Dyle is also quite near, and we can easily drive there. . . ."

"Pieter, I hardly recognize you. Don't you want to work in the summer?"

"Oh yes, but much less. I need rest, too. And in the country one has more time. There's another staircase here, come this way. . . ."

Helen gazed with wide-open eyes at the rooms, windows, staircases, and the view. On the first floor the painters and upholsterers greeted the master and mistress of the house with great respect. The rooms were still bare, but it could already be seen how this wonderful summer residence would look when finished. The bedroom and bathroom were all ready. The furniture was new here, with lace-edged bedclothes from Mechlin. Helen opened a cupboard and found a house coat and some lingerie in it.

"I am amazed, Pieter. Where did you get all this?"

"It wasn't very difficult—your mother bought everything. But I told her that it was to be a surprise. Wait a moment, I'll get the farmer's wife to make ready something to eat. We must get the coachman settled, too."

"But how could you keep it so secret? The coachman never told me."

"He didn't know. I always came here on horseback or in a hired carriage."

The baby was fed, and then they had their supper alone. Pieter watched Helen's face. She was impatient, wanting to continue her tour of inspection. Whenever their glances met, she smiled and touched his hand gratefully. They then strolled round their property. Helen gazed at the tower, asked a thousand questions, insisted on looking at the farm buildings, the stables, kitchen garden, and barns. When they turned back, arm in arm, toward their new home, Pieter was filled with glowing warmth. He pressed Helen's arm to his side. Before they went to bed, there was a bath waiting for them which Pieter had ordered some time earlier. Beside the handsome wooden tub with copper hoops a large vessel held steaming hot water and a barrel contained cold water.

"The water supply is a bit of a problem," Pieter explained, "but during the summer one prefers to bathe outside. The children especially will

enjoy it. Nicolaas will be able to ride a great deal. I shall ride too, and often go driving with you. Tomorrow we are to have a guest—I wrote Teniers from Antwerp, asking him to come over. And, if we like to stay another day, we can go the day after tomorrow to Dry Toren."

When darkness fell and they lay in each other's arms, moonlight shone in through the open window.

"Listen," Pieter said. "The frogs—millions of them in the ponds. Our little ponds. . . ."

"How funny they are. Holding a concert for us."

They lay awake, silent, for a long time. Helen suddenly laughed.

"What is it dear?"

"You know, I suspected something. I found your country trips a bit suspicious. But I never dreamed that you were buying a castle."

"Well then, what did you think?"

"I don't know. Perhaps that you were courting some woman."

Pieter suddenly felt wide awake.

"And you didn't say anything? It was just a vague suspicion? Weren't you jealous?"

"Oh my God, it's different with a woman. What can she do? She is completely helpless. My mother explained to me that a wise woman never says a word if her husband deceives her. Sooner or later, he is certain to become bored with his new love and return to the old."

"But Helen, can you bear the thought that I should take another woman into my arms, that I should look into her eyes with love, that I should kiss her?"

"How can you ask such a silly question? Of course I should be wildly unhappy if I heard of it, or saw it with my own eyes. But how could I be unhappy if I did not know of it?"

"Aren't you jealous of me at all?"

"No. It has never occurred to me to be jealous."

She said these last words with a yawn, half asleep. And, as Pieter said nothing more, she was asleep the next moment. But Pieter was unable to sleep. His heart ached with an inexpressible sadness. His wife had not dreamed of being jealous of him. Why? Because she wasn't in love with him. His gifts, his signs of affection could move her to gratitude, but not to love.

VIII

The King of England somehow managed to overcome his financial difficulties. Van Dyck sent Pieter word of this, but Charles himself informed him that he was eagerly awaiting the pictures for Whitehall and that the money to cover the costs of transport had already been forwarded to Wake, the Antwerp merchant who handled English economic affairs in Flanders. So Pieter took the pictures, which had long been ready, out of storage, and found that every one of them had suffered. So once again they were put on the easel and master and pupils worked on them for several days. Gout was once more troubling him, and he found it impossible to take the pictures himself to England as the King had requested. He therefore sent one of his pupils, who would be able to supervise the setting of the panels in position.

About this time the specter of old age began to trouble him. When he looked at some of his earlier self-portraits he realized with terror that he was aging, and much more rapidly than before. Hitherto every two years had only left twelve months' trace upon him, but now every year left him apparently two years older. Out of curiosity he now painted himself once more, for he knew that he could see clearly only what he painted. And, as he gazed at himself in the mirror while his hand plied the brush, he realized that he was painting an old man. His features had somehow sharpened. His alert expression had hardened into suspiciousness, wisdom had changed into cunning and mistrust, experience had faded into disillusionment and pain. He had learned not to put much weight on his right foot, and recently he had begun to feel a certain constriction round his heart, especially during his morning rides. He no longer liked Antwerp in winter; it was too cold, damp, and noisy. He longed for the sun and the blessed quiet of the country; he could hardly await the arrival of spring. He would spend the long evening discussing with Helen how to furnish the castle and the details of their plans for the summer. A list of guests had already been drawn up. The first was Albrecht, who was invited to stay for the whole sum-

mer. Helen's sisters, together with their families, would have to be invited one by one. When he attended the wedding of Breughel's older daughter, Catarina, whose guardian he was, he saw Anna, the younger Breughel girl, dancing all the time with young Teniers. He told Helen:

"You more or less share my guardianship of the Breughel children. You could make Anna's whole life happy."

"Gladly, if you only tell me how."

"She seems to like Teniers a good deal. Let us invite her for the summer to Steen—then she can see him every day. I'd like to marry her off. She is poor, but Teniers is a rich young man and needs no dowry. As a *chatelaine* you can easily promote the match."

"Very well," said Helen happily, proud of her important role. "Leave it to me. You invite her—and I'll look round in my wardrobe; perhaps I can dress her up a bit."

They also had to invite old Brant, who had lost his wife several years ago and seldom went out as he was in poor health. Helen liked him—he was her kinsman, being father-in-law to young Daniel Fourment. Slowly she collected a long list of guests, each of them having his or her allotted time. That old friend of Pieter and Gevaert, the painter Van der Mont, was also on it. He had a beautiful daughter, and Helen wanted to surround herself with pretty women to offset her own beauty.

Brant, when he visited them, insisted on talking politics.

"Pieter," he said, "they have put up a new crucifix in the Cathedral. It's bronze, the work of Couthals. But do you know where they got the bronze?"

"No, I haven't heard."

"Long before you were born, Duke Alva, that cruel tyrant, had a bronze statue erected to himself in Antwerp. It showed him flourishing a Marshal's baton, with the oppressed Netherlands nobility at his feet. When the Duke died, the people broke his statue into pieces. Some of these were thrown into the Scheldt, the rest have been lying in the casemates for the last seventy years. That's the bronze Couthals used for his crucifix. A fine thing! One in the eye for the Duke of Alva, what do you think?"

"Nothing. I have often explained to you why I've abandoned politics. I am only interested to see whether the French or the Dutch will set my house afire or not."

"What will you do if the Court appoints you to a new diplomatic mission?"

"Nothing. They won't appoint me. There's a new regime now, with new men. They know that I have given up politics for good."

"I heard rumors about Holland being ready to make peace. This Infante is an excellent man. He has driven the Dutch into a tight corner. Do you know what he has done?"

"No. You are my only source of news. I have forbidden political discussions in the studio. What is the news, then?"

"Well, it seems that the Infante deserved his victory at Nördlingen, for he hit on the right solution now, one which no one had ever thought of before—neither Isabella nor Spinola, nor Leganez nor Tilly. He has taken the Fortress of Schenkenhans. It's at the confluence of the Rhine and the Waal and, whoever possesses it, masters the district and is a constant source of danger to Holland. They tell me from The Hague that they are greatly frightened there. If it was ever worth while to discuss peace with them, now is the time. Antwerp might be made secure for a long time. The Scheldt would recover its old importance."

Pieter felt like an old battle horse hearing a trumpet call. But he shook his head.

"It's not my job any longer. I want a quiet life. And what if I had an attack of gout at The Hague?"

They spoke no more about the matter, but a week later Pieter received an urgent summons from the Infante. He still did not believe that a diplomatic mission could be in question. He packed for a few days; perhaps he would have some painting to do. In Brussels he called first on Albrecht and then waited for the audience. The Infante received him in the same room in which the Archduke Albrecht and Isabella had so often received him.

"Let us do as we did in Madrid, Rubens. You will paint my portrait, and meantime we can talk."

Pieter started sketching, and the Infante soon said:

"Well, as you have heard, I have settled the Dutch. . . ."

"I heard about it, Your Highness. It was not only a military victory but an important step in foreign policy. The triumphal arches of Antwerp have proved prophetic."

"Thank God. Now they are squealing for mercy. This is the best moment for peace negotiations. Rubens, you must go to The Hague."

"Your Highness, this is a great honor. But I no longer meddle in politics."

"I'll appoint you my Resident at The Hague."

"I have just bought a country estate, Your Highness. I should endanger my property if I were to leave everything now. Soon I am moving to my country place—I have already invited many guests. It's impossible, Your Highness. I am an old man and an invalid."

"That castle won't run away; summer comes every year. If you are an invalid, I am sure you will recover. I have faith in your talents. D'Aytona also shares this faith. I want to govern Flanders well by always using the right man in the right place."

"It's not at all certain, Your Highness, that Duke Olivarez will approve of me as the right person."

"A fig for Olivarez. I won't consult him—let him try to unseat me here. Don't be difficult, Rubens, it is in the interest of the Empire, and your duty is to serve the Empire's interests."

"But I am not the right person, Your Highness. I am prone to attacks of gout. And during the negotiations I should be thinking more of my home and family than of the matters in hand."

They were unable to agree. For twenty years Pieter had worked for peace between Flanders and Holland, but now he was thinking of Helen and the summer. Next day the Infante tackled him again with weighty and stubborn arguments.

"Do it for my sake," he said at last, "and for the memory of my aunt whom you loved so much."

Pieter hesitated only a moment but that moment was enough for Fernando.

"You see, where there's a will there's a way. I am writing today for your passport."

Pieter's instructions took a whole hour to detail. When he took his leave, he had promised to finish the picture at home and await the passport there. But, as he bowed himself through the door, he was bitterly regretting his surrender. Such a mission might last for months, perhaps years. How could he tell Helen? He took his son aside and told him

briefly what the Infante wanted—he knew that he could trust Albrecht implicitly.

“This would mean, my son, that we couldn’t be together at Steen. Do you ever meet the French diplomats?”

“The Ambassador isn’t here of course. But I know some of Richelieu’s agents.”

“Well, let a word drop skillfully that I have been painting the Infante’s portrait. That will be sufficient.”

“Leave it to me, Father.”

Pieter returned to Antwerp and prayed for the first time in his life that Richelieu’s espionage organization should be efficient. When at last a letter came from the Court, he read it jubilantly; The Hague had refused to issue a passport to him, probably under French pressure. Now he confessed the whole affair to Helen, who burst into tears.

“Why are you crying, Helen? I told you I didn’t have to go to The Hague.”

“Yes, but what if you had been granted the passport? I should have been left alone with all those guests. You never think of me.”

Pieter laughed and took her into his arms. At the end of May they moved to Steen, though Pieter would shortly have to go to Brussels to swear allegiance as court painter to the new Governor.

The first week they spent alone, to put the servants through their paces. Pieter worked little, went for walks, and took long drives with the three children. He also rode and swam with Nicolaas. Helen played chatelaine with great enjoyment, and they were all happy and carefree. At the end of the week, on Helen’s insistence, they went to Mechlin to visit the Mayor. Helen put on her finest gown and sat proudly in the carriage beside her world-famous husband. The Mayoress was quite flustered by the rare honor and at once sent to the Town Hall for her husband, who promptly left an important meeting to receive his distinguished guest. The men chatted animatedly about wheat, fruit, and dairy farming; the women gossiped of the Antwerp fashions, children’s illnesses, and servant troubles. Pieter watched Helen a little apprehensively out of the corner of his eye, yet her manner was exactly suited to the occasion, and so charming were her beauty and high spirits that their hosts were visibly impressed. When they took their leave, she invited them very prettily to stay with them.

"Your tone was exactly right today," Pieter praised her in the carriage on the way home. "You must always behave like that. It is a fine, but difficult art, to be dignified and modest at the same time."

"That was nothing, Pieter. Just see what I can do when we have plenty of guests."

The first guest soon arrived. Albrecht came from Brussels. Helen received him with exceptional cordiality, leading him by the arm to his room in the tower. For his part, Albrecht, now a handsome young man of twenty-two, inquired at once after his half brother and half sisters, whom he hardly knew, and tried to make friends with them with apparent sincerity. As he played with little Frans, Clara, and Isabella, Pieter watched his son, feeling deeply moved. He knew well what was going on in the young man's noble and sensitive heart.

That same day three of his collaborators arrived: Quellyn, the newly employed Willeborts, and Borrekens with his wife, the Breughel girl, who brought her younger sister, Anna Breughel. The next day Teniers came, and two days later Daniel Fourment and his wife. Helen was in her element: the table in the large ground-floor dining room lengthened enormously, and the noise of children filled the house. There were excursions, picnics, swimming parties, and Helen arranged everything. Pieter did not appear among his guests until sunset. Throughout the day he was fully engaged with his collaborators in the studio. At the same time the activities of the Antwerp studio had not ceased; other collaborators and students of his were carrying on there with commissioned work.

On the prearranged day he set out for Brussels to swear allegiance as court painter to the Infante in exactly the same words he had used twenty-seven years before when receiving the office from the Archduke Albrecht. After the ceremony a private audience followed, during which Prince Fernando gave him a commission of such dimensions that Pieter was quite dazed by the magnitude of the task.

"His Majesty, my brother, has asked me to convey an important and urgent message to you, Rubens. Do you know the Torre de la Parada?"

"Yes, Your Highness. It is the name of one of His Majesty's hunting lodges."

"Yes, and whenever I think of Spain, my thoughts fly to that particular spot. I love pictures and hunting as ardently as the King. Pictures I love perhaps a little less passionately, but hunting certainly more. Well, His

Majesty is rebuilding and refurnishing the Torre de la Parada. You probably heard of the project in Madrid?"

"Yes, Your Highness. His Majesty did mention it to me, and even instructed Velasquez to give me the measurements of the rooms. But I looked upon it as a plan His Majesty had no thought of carrying out in the near future. I still have the measurements, however, for I always preserve such documents carefully."

"Excellent. It is His Majesty's wish that all the rooms of the castle should be decorated with your pictures. You must select those painters of Antwerp you think most suited to the task, and with their help supply the pictures in the shortest possible time. His Majesty has no wish to put reins on your imagination by specifying subjects. He would, however, like you to select your material from the *Metamorphosis* of Ovid."

"That is a splendid task, Your Highness. I am happy and proud to undertake it. How many pictures will be required?"

"There are eight rooms on the ground floor, which will take, on the average, five pictures each. On the first floor there are twelve rooms, each requiring six pictures. That is one hundred and twelve pictures in all. His Majesty wishes me to impress upon you that delivery should take place as soon as possible."

"Your Highness, I am afraid the entire works of Ovid do not provide material for one hundred and twelve pictures. And to ask even the Rubens studio to produce so many pictures in a matter of months is a well-nigh impossible request. Never has any painter received so gigantic a commission."

"It is a commission worthy of the King of Spain. If Ovid fails to provide enough subjects, you can draw on other mythological sources. In any case, we shall send your suggestions to His Majesty, and he will doubtless soon let you hear what he thinks of them."

"Your Highness, even an outline of what I should propose would entail the writing of a huge memorandum."

"Don't grumble, Rubens. You know His Majesty, King Philip. If he wants something, he has to get it at once. Go back to your studio and begin the job tomorrow. You have worked for the King before, so we needn't discuss terms. The prices will be the same. In a few days' time send me a list of the painters you think of employing."

Pieter sent word to Steen that he had to remain in Antwerp on urgent

business. Then he drew up a list of ten painters, six of his own pupils, three others, and himself. Three of them were in Steen; he would have to arrange matters with the other six here in Antwerp. He first visited his old friend Cornelis de Vos, who accepted the work with gratitude, for he had six children and few commissions. Next he called on Jordaens, the secret Protestant who had married the daughter of their master, Van Noort. He was less grateful than de Vos; he wanted to argue about delivery dates, remuneration, the number of pictures. But at last he undertook to paint twenty pictures. The next was Snijders, his old beloved Snijders, who was now doing well with a studio of his own. He showed some hesitancy at first; but, when he discovered that he would be able to sign the pictures with his own name, he at once undertook to paint twenty pictures.

Pieter had now secured his collaborators, but he needed as well a hundred and twelve subjects. This was literary rather than artistic work, and only one man could help him, Gevaert, Antwerp's greatest expert on classical literature. But Gevaert was very busy with the great memorial volume of the Infante's entry into the city, and, as he was a slow and conscientious worker, he could not have much time to spare. So Pieter packed his own fine Venetian copy of Ovid and a selection of other mythological works and returned to Steen to resume his interrupted summer holidays.

To his great surprise he found that the house party had increased. There were people at his table to whom he had to be introduced for the first time. These were not staying in the house, he discovered later; they were dinner guests from Mechlin and the neighboring estates. Helen had informed the Mayor and his wife that she would be glad to see young people at the castle. That had been sufficient invitation. New faces appeared every day. Wine was drunk in no small measure at luncheon; in the afternoon swimming parties were formed; and, when the evening came, the company broke into song. On Pieter's first evening at home Helen made her first attempt to sit up with her gay guests instead of retiring with her husband. However, Pieter put his foot down, and Mevrouw Fourment as usual took over the duties of hostess and the guests continued to enjoy themselves thoroughly. Pieter slept soundly, and early next morning was already pondering over the works of Ovid, his decision to

work less in summer forgotten. He immediately started on one or two of the pictures with the help of his collaborators in Steen.

On the suggestion of Teniers, who was now furiously courting Anna Breughel, a party went one Sunday afternoon to the village of Eppeghem to watch the peasants merrymaking at the inn, and Pieter, who always kept his Sundays free, joined them. That particular day a large company was assembled at the castle; three carriages had arrived bringing guests from Mechlin and the surrounding countryside. Just before the midday meal, Teniers drew Pieter aside and told him with some confusion in his rustic manner that he had fallen in love with Anna Breughel and that he wished to ask Pieter, as the girl's guardian, for permission to marry her. Pieter readily gave his consent, and in consequence the ordinary Sunday lunch became a noisy betrothal feast. After the meal was over, the carriages appeared, and Helen supervised the difficult arrangements of who should sit with whom; it seemed to Pieter that she pointedly passed over Albrecht when choosing her own partner, and that she had her eye on a young man of Mechlin named Brocke, who went to sit beside her.

The party from Steen at first kept exclusively to itself at the inn; but before long all barriers were down. The ladies danced with the country lads, the gentlemen with the peasant girls. Pieter noticed that Brocke danced well and was a pleasure to watch when in motion; but he found him too boisterous in manner and too much addicted to vulgar horseplay. Yet the fellow could certainly dance, and he excelled himself when he danced with Helen. Albrecht was also an accomplished dancer and certainly the most handsome young man present. His partner was the beautiful Clara van der Mont, and he seemed to take pleasure in her company. A little later, flushed and with sparkling eyes, he sat down in an empty chair next to his father.

"Tell me, my son, is there any kind of trouble or misunderstanding between you and Helen?"

"None whatever, Father," Albrecht answered, suddenly looking grave. "Helen is most kind to me, and I, for my part, try to be a good friend to her."

Pieter felt reassured, and later, when he asked Helen the same question, he received the same reply. He made a few sketches of the peasants, but when sunset came he signed to Helen to let her know that it was time

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to go. When the young man from Mechlin asked leave to part in a few more dances, he refused curtly.

Next day Pieter began a picture of this peasant merrymaking. He managed to put in one or two hours' work on it every day. He was among his guests only at mealtimes, and in the evening Helen read the gossip to him. Every day he spent half an hour with Albrecht in the tower room. They talked of archaeology or revived memories of old days when Bella was still alive. But one morning Albrecht broached something of importance.

"Father, I must tell you that I have found my future wife."

"That makes me very happy, Albrecht. There's nothing I want more than to live to see my grandchildren. Is she the little Van der Meulen? I approve your choice. And what does she say about it?"

"She is a good-hearted and intelligent girl. We have hardly talked of love, and that is perhaps strange. But, what is stranger; we have talked a lot about marriage. We have both decided not to attempt an engagement till we have tested our feelings. I want to go on a long tour. Father, as you and my grandfather did. I am twenty-two, and it is time for me to do it."

"Of course, of course. The years are running past, and I simply must think of it. When do you want to leave?"

"I should like to start packing tomorrow. But I'd like to go over my plans with you in detail."

"Tomorrow? Why such a great hurry? Stay with us till the end of the year, then you can leave from Antwerp."

"I should like to go earlier, Father. It is much pleasanter to travel in summer than in autumn. By that time I might be in Venice. Leave it to me, please, soon."

"As you wish, my boy. I am only sorry that you are leaving. I have been happy to have you here. And what are your plans when you return?"

"By that time both Clara and I will know if my long absence has made any difference in our feelings for each other. If we then decide to marry, I shall only need your blessing."

"Very well. Tomorrow we shall discuss your journey, and I shall write you some letters of introduction."

route as his father; through the valley of the Rhine, crossing the Alps into Italy, there visiting Venice, Rome, and the smaller cities, and on the way back staying at Milan, Pisa, Genoa; then he would go to Provence and call on Peiresc, then to Paris and Brussels, and so home.

"Be economical, my boy, but if there's anything you want to see or study, do not miss it merely to save money."

Pieter and Nicolaas accompanied him as far as Mechlin. Nicolaas was now beginning to be quite the young gentleman; his mustache was beginning to grow and he liked to call himself twenty, although he was only eighteen. His nature was quite different from his brother's; he was sentimental, talkative, easily moved. As he watched his sons, Pieter remembered the deep affection that had linked him to Philips when they were the same age.

By this time he had finished painting the peasant dance, and there was another canvas on the easel, representing a joust with prancing steeds and knights in shining armor. He followed this with a picture intended to amuse Helen: an elegant company of ladies and gentlemen talking and flirting in the grounds of a summer palace. There were fewer cavaliers in the picture than young ladies—Helen was always complaining that it was difficult to get sufficient young men. Helen was the center of the composition; the deep décolletage of her fashionable dress was the most dazzling white spot in the whole scene. Amorettes hovered over the company, scattering flowers, here pushing a lady toward her beau, there overhearing an intimate conversation. Ironically he entitled the composition *Conversation à la Mode*—a painter's way of teasing his wife. It was a great success; and, although the subject was not mythological, he put it among the Parada pictures and made a sketch for the engraver.

It was already September. Most of the summer guests had been and gone; the Breughel girls had returned to Antwerp. Teniers had fixed his wedding for April, and the rebuilding of the Breughel house, where the newly married couple planned to live, was being discussed. The last of the Antwerp guests were now in Steen, but friends from Mechlin constantly visited the castle. Helen decided to give a grand festival party, with feasting and dancing.

She invited a very large number of guests, and throughout the afternoon Pieter heard in his studio the noise of the party foregathering in the grounds in front of the castle. Later on musicians arrived from Mechlin

and dancing started. As was fitting, Pieter left his work to join the company; he was also anxious to keep Helen from dancing too much, since for two months they had known that she was expecting her fourth child.

Going down the stairs, he began to feel twinges of pain in his leg. His old enemy, gout, was attacking him again. There had recently been some raw, rainy days, and such changes of weather always affected him. He joined the company in rather low spirits. Helen was dancing with young Brocke from Mechlin, and there was a general air of enjoyment. Two of Helen's married sisters were also dancing. Pieter walked about listlessly, limping on his right leg. No one paid much attention to him. All the guests were quite young people; he had no one to talk to. He had previously arranged with Helen that the musicians were to leave at eight o'clock, though the guests could stay on if they wished. Helen's sisters would play the hostess jointly, while she and himself would retire as usual. He waited for eight o'clock with impatience and in considerable pain. But, when the hour came at last, the orchestra showed no sign of leaving. At last he asked one of his sisters-in-law to find Helen. His wife came up to him on the arm of Philips's son:

"Don't be a spoilsport, Pieter," she pouted. "Look how much we are enjoying ourselves—do let me go on for a bit."

Her eyes were radiant, her lips redder than ever.

"All right, two more dances—but that's all."

Yet the music continued even after those two dances. Pieter said to Picquery, his brother-in-law:

"Would you tell Helen to send the musicians away at once? I expect her upstairs immediately. I am going up now myself."

He limped upstairs. His leg hurt him devilishly, and he was extremely irritable. In his bedroom he stood at the window without lighting up and watched the company gyrating below him. Helen had still not appeared. After waiting for some time, he grew furious and, ignoring the pain in his leg, set out to find her. He opened the door and stiffened. On the topmost step of the stair, about ten yards from him, Helen stood in the arms of a stranger who had just finished kissing her. Then he let her go and vanished down the stairs. Pieter recognized him now; it was young Brocke from Mechlin. Neither of the two had seen him, and Helen came toward the bedroom, a smile on her face, gay coquetry in her eyes.

She only glanced up when she was at the door—she cried out softly and stopped. Pieter's face showed her that he had seen everything.

"Come into the room," Pieter said in a hoarse whisper.

When the door closed behind her, Pieter was afraid that he would faint. He staggered to the nearest chair and hid his face in his hands. Helen behaved like a trapped vixen, trying to exercise all her cunning to the last.

"This Brocke is really an impudent fellow," she began, as if she were a school child denouncing a classmate for some mischief, "he suddenly caught hold of me and kissed me. . . ."

Pieter interrupted her in a strained voice, his face pale:

"Don't lie so impudently or I'll kill you. . . ."

She fell silent and gave a shrug as if realizing that she had been caught red-handed. Then she moved slowly and hesitantly toward the dressing room. Pieter shouted at her:

"Stay where you are!"

"For God's sake," Helen whispered, "the window's open, they'll hear you downstairs."

"Sit down on that chair and talk," Pieter said, his voice trembling. "I want to know everything. How did it begin and how long have you been having an affair with him?"

"Pieter," she cried out, "an affair! How can you talk like that?"

"Don't try to brazen it out: that only makes it worse. Tell me, what is there between you? Speak—or, so help me God, I'll strangle you."

She burst into tears and became suddenly helpless and humble.

"There's nothing between us. He kissed me for the first time today. He has been paying court to me for a long time, but always just in fun. I said good-by to him downstairs, but he followed me and demanded a kiss. I laughed. When we were on the landing, he suddenly took me in his arms and kissed me, then he ran away. I know I shouldn't have let him follow me. But one kiss isn't such a horrible sin. Pieter, forgive me; I promise to be more careful. Believe me, I haven't been unfaithful to you. Please, Pieter, forgive me. . . ."

She rose, but Pieter stretched out his hand to ward her off.

"Sit down. You have lied to me. I want to know the truth."

"It is the truth. This was the first time he kissed me."

"I don't believe you. If a woman is kissed for the first time, she defends herself. You didn't."

"I was taken by surprise. I was just going to scold him when he rushed away. I didn't want to shout, even though I felt outraged. . . . I didn't want a scandal with guests in the house."

"You felt outraged? You had a pleasant smile on your face. Why are you still lying? Do you want me to shake you until I force the truth out of you? Don't treat me like an old idiot whom you can fool with that chicken brain of yours. How long has this affair been going on?"

"Pieter, for God's sake believe me. This kissing was nothing but a little playful fun. . . ."

"Kissing. Not one kiss. Well, I'm learning the truth at last. When did it happen first?"

"Look, Pieter, I'll tell you everything; at least you'll see how innocent I am. Jan came here the first time with the Mayor and. . . ."

"Who's this Jan? Is it this Brocke? Is he Jan to you just as I am Pieter?"

"Brocke. . . . He began to play the fool at once, but it was all just in fun. Everybody laughed at him. Once he kissed me, and then I was very angry and told him never to come again. He apologized and explained that it was all a joke and everybody would think the same. . . ."

"Everybody? Did he kiss you in public?"

Helen blushed a deep red. She seemed terribly embarrassed.

"Well?" Pieter persisted. "Who was it that was to consider the kiss only a joke—according to Mynheer Brocke?"

"Albrecht."

"I see. Albrecht. I knew that there was something between you. Let me hear the details. What has Albrecht to do with this?"

"Well . . . we went to that small wood near Eppeghem. I sat down in the grass because I was tired. Teniers was there, too, and Brocke—the others went on walking. But Teniers left us; he wanted to see where Anna Breughel was. Then Brocke began to tell me that I was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; he said he loved me and kissed me suddenly. Albrecht, who was looking for the Van der Mont girl, came up just at that moment. I felt terribly ashamed and told Albrecht that I couldn't help it, and asked him not to tell you. But he didn't even answer, he just looked at me and went away. Albrecht has never liked me. I'm

sure he hates me. And why? Have I ever harmed him? They all hate me. Old Brant as well. He promised to come for a week and never came. Daniel's wife hates me, too, because you married me when Aunt Bella died. How can I help it if she died?"

"Oh, you're a martyr, aren't you, with all your grievances? But let's go back to Albrecht. You knew very well that he wouldn't say anything—he didn't want to hurt my feelings. Albrecht loves me. He preferred to go abroad rather than have to watch his father being disgraced. He is a real gentleman. But as for you, when you saw that nothing had happened, you went on with the kissing and all the rest of it. . . ."

"No, I didn't. I told that man not to come here again. You may remember, he didn't come for a fortnight. . . ."

"Remember? Am I likely to have watched Mynheer Brocke? Should I notice the existence of such a worm? So he stayed away for a fortnight, did he? Then you invited him again, because you couldn't do without him?"

"No, no, he came of his own accord. He promised to behave himself. I wanted to explain that to Albrecht, but he avoided me as if I had the plague. He saw that Brocke was coming here again; he thought all sorts of slanderous things about me . . . and he went away. . . ."

"Slanderous things. Very interesting! But they were things he had seen with his own eyes. And you carried on undisturbed."

"But I wouldn't have carried it on if Albrecht had stayed. It's his fault, for I was afraid of him, and still he went away."

"Your logic is perfect. Yet the important thing is that you have confessed: you *did* carry on. You went on kissing and cuddling. And in the end you became Brocke's mistress. . . ."

"No," cried Helen. "No, no! Don't say that! It isn't true."

"How am I to believe you? At first you said he had never kissed you before. Now that turns out to be a lie; you have been kissing for weeks. You tell me you haven't been his mistress. If we go on talking long enough, I'll find that that's a lie, too. Do you know what you have done to me? You have destroyed my faith in you forever. You have crippled my whole life. And you are pregnant. How can I be sure the child is mine?"

"Pieter, don't say such horrible things. You know that this is the third month of my pregnancy. And it's not eight weeks since Brocke came here

for the first time. But I swear by God that I wasn't his mistress. By the children. By the child I shall bear. . . ."

"No. I forbid you to drag the children into this. You may perjure them as well as yourself. I know you well. Swear by your beauty."

"Gladly. Let me lose my beauty, my health, let my hair fall out, my cheek and bosom shrivel, if I ever had an affair with anybody, if I ever deceived you."

"Oh? And now swear the same oath that you haven't even deceived me in your thoughts with this Brocke. That you didn't even think of it."

There was a long pause. Then Helen said, deathly pale:

"I won't swear that."

"You see. Tell me, frankly, are you in love with this man?"

"No. It isn't love. I don't think love is like that."

"You don't think so? So you don't know what love is like. You've never been in love with me."

"Don't say that, Pieter. Ever since my childhood I have admired and revered you. And I still do. But a woman needs something else, too."

"Something else. Sensuality. The lust of a female animal. Shame on you. You make me loathe the sight of you."

"Then you ought to loathe yourself for you are much more sensual than I am. No, that's not it; you needn't think I'm just a ravening animal; I haven't fallen as low as that. Jan Brocke is able to entertain me. All the young people who came here had great fun with both of us. But you can't talk gay nonsense and be merry over nothing. Five minutes of you makes people yawn."

"So I am to blame for everything, am I? That's really superb."

"I didn't say that, Pieter. But even a murderer is allowed to defend himself."

"All right, but let's keep to the point. Tell me about this kissing—where, how often?"

They went on talking till dawn. By that time Pieter had discovered that Helen and Brocke had been kissing often and passionately. Both were weary to exhaustion. Pieter's knee had swollen badly. Helen began to undress, but Pieter stopped her.

"No, Helen, you will never strip again in front of me. It is impossible for us to separate, the scandal would harm the children too much. But I won't be your husband any longer. You will sleep alone in this bedroom."

"That will be a big enough scandal—for the servants will gossip—the whole family will hear about it. . . ."

"My gout will be a good enough excuse. . . . Now, wake up Nanny. I need a hot cloth . . . my leg is aching badly."

"But couldn't I. . . ."

"No, I couldn't bear you to touch me. There's an empty room next to the studio; I'll sleep there. I'll do my best to keep up appearances before other people, and I must ask you to do the same; but we won't be man and wife any longer, Helen. And, if you dare to look at any other man and cuckold me, I swear I'll kill you. After this you will live like a nun, even if you are a lovely young matron. That is your punishment. Good-by."

He staggered away and reeled up against the wall before finding the door.

"You don't love me any more, Pieter," said Helen, sobbing.

"I? I'm terribly in love with you. But how can you know what a desperate, bitter thing the love of an old man is!"

He made the necessary excuses to the nurse who prepared the bed. He was staring through the window at the sunrise and its amazing colors. Pure gold and purple flooded the Flemish plain. Tears filled Pieter's eyes. He did not try to wipe them away.

IX

When they returned to Antwerp, the sentence Pieter had pronounced governed their relationship. At first it was difficult. Helen had recourse to her old weapons, displaying her leg in Pieter's presence, bending in front of him in a low-cut dress to pick up something; once, when Pieter came into the room unexpectedly, he found her naked. When all this did not help, she tried to talk him round, to apologize, to argue. But Pieter, merciless to her and to himself, cut all conversation short. He, too, felt guilty. He should not have married again at his age.

During the day he saw little of Helen as he was working hard. The huge commission of the King of Spain kept the studio so busy that he undertook new orders only with a delivery date eighteen months ahead. The Infante pressed him, sending letters even from the battlefield. The fortunes of war were favoring Fernando. He had driven back the Dutch beyond their frontiers and had penetrated deeply into French territory. He was quite near Paris by the time Richelieu had managed to reorganize the French defenses and forced Fernando's smaller army to retire. But even this retreat was worth a victory. Richelieu had started this war with the intention of destroying Spain completely and now he was being forced to defend his own country.

When the Infante brought back his troops to Flanders, he came to Antwerp—straight to the Rubens studio.

"I came only to see you, Rubens. The King is urging me so much that I want to see myself how the work is proceeding."

Pieter presented his well-known collaborators, Jordaens, De Vos, Snijders, and the others. There were several finished pictures. The Infante liked the *Conversation* especially.

"This is all very fine, but where are the hundred and twelve? I must say you have all worked very slowly while I have been saving your skins in France."

The painters were silent; only stubborn Jordaens, the Calvinist, made to answer, but Pieter quickly forestalled him.

"These gentlemen are not responsible, Your Highness. I alone direct the work and regulate its tempo. But I have unfortunately a good excuse: since the commission was given, I have had two long and severe attacks of gout."

"I am very sorry to hear it, but His Majesty is urging me all the time. . . . Now where could we discuss the transport of the pictures?"

He exchanged a hardly noticeable glance with his aide-de-camp. Pieter's sharp eyes caught it, however, and interpreted it immediately. His Highness had come really on Helen's account. He was reputed in Brussels to be an insatiable profligate; and, after once seeing Helen, who was considered to be the loveliest woman in Antwerp, he wished to see her again.

"My wife will be very happy if Your Highness honors us with a visit," said Pieter, adding, on the staircase: "She will be very sorry that Your Highness should again see her at a disadvantage. We are expecting another baby, Your Highness—the fourth."

"Well," the Infante said, "I must say you are proving your mettle."

Helen did not appear at once as she had to dress, and meanwhile Fernando discussed the transport of the pictures to Spain. They would have to pass through France, and it was agreed that the Venetian Ambassador in Brussels, who had close contacts with the Paris government, should be asked to obtain the necessary permission.

The whole thing could have been settled very quickly, but the Infante was waiting to see the mistress of the house. At last she entered in the full splendor of her beauty, although she was five months gone. The Infante made no effort to hide his interest. He would hardly release her hand after he had kissed it.

"I came on an official errand to your husband; but, although we have settled everything, I didn't want to miss the loveliest lady in Antwerp. Let me say this, *señora*; you are lovelier than ever. Your race is very fortunate; full-figured, beautiful women are much more numerous here than in Spain, where so many of our women are boyish and slender. Your husband may have told you of them; he has seen the Spanish beauties."

"I cannot deny it, Your Highness, ours are more beautiful."

"I am glad you know it. And I see that your appreciation of their beauty does not stop short at painting them."

"If Your Highness refers to my children, I can only say that I am a loyal

subject. According to the Church, a marriage with numerous offspring pleases God. This is a religious household, Your Highness."

The Infante laughed. He liked such jokes.

"Do you pray much, *señora*?" he turned to Helen.

"Yes, Your Highness, and I also pray for the triumph of our armies—for Your Highness."

"Rubens, you old rascal, you've chosen your wife well."

"Your Highness, a man who chooses for himself chooses carefully. And I knew well that my choice was for myself alone."

This remark held a polite reproof, and the Infante understood it. He changed his tone.

"In any case, I'll report to His Majesty what exceptional beauty I have discovered. But where should one find beauty if not in the house of an artist? Meanwhile, I must confess, I am beginning to feel famished."

"If Your Highness doesn't consider it presumptuous," Helen interposed, "our house would be happy to serve you with some refreshment."

Thus the Infante stayed for the midday meal. His courting of the hostess was undisguised. He seemed not at all embarrassed by Pieter's presence. He stayed long after luncheon, telling stories of his French campaign. When he left at last, he kissed Helen's hand lingeringly and said jocularly:

"Be careful, Rubens, or I'll start paying court to your fair lady. If I were married, I'd take her along as a lady-in-waiting."

"It would be labor lost, Your Highness. My wife is so impeccably virtuous that she is as famous for that as for her beauty."

"Don't be overconfident, Pieter," Helen said gaily, "you might rue it one day."

But, when the Infante left, the smile of polite conversation was wiped from their faces. It was always the same. Whenever there was a guest, they talked gaily, but each of them was play-acting to guard their painful secret. In the evening they parted without a word. During the day they were husband and wife, in the evening they became mortal enemies. At the New Year, Pieter gave Helen a valuable ring, merely to enable her to show it round the family as a token of her happiness. When he had to go to Brussels, he told her in front of the children that he would be away for a week and expected her not to receive any guests apart from relatives during his absence. Helen's eyes were filled with tears.

"I shouldn't have received anyone, in any case."

He had to go to Brussels because at last the Antwerp Town Council was resolved to present to the Infante the paintings of his ceremonial entrance. These had been damaged by exposure to the weather and by the dismantling. Pieter's task was to restore them all, at a special fee offered by the Town Council; but he also had to travel to Brussels with the Financial Secretary of Antwerp and decide where they should hang in the Governor's palace. He finished his work just before the death of Ferdinand II, the Holy Roman Emperor, plunged the palace into court mourning. Ferdinand's son, the King of Hungary, succeeded him as Emperor, and the Infanta Maria, whose not very handsome features Pieter had transferred to canvas in Madrid, became Empress of the great Eastern Hapsburg Empire. The Infante Fernando did not hide his delight that his sister should have achieved the imperial crown as the wife of that young kinsman of his who had shared his victory at Nördlingen. One of the Rubens pictures which were placed in position in the palace depicted this victory.

"Isn't this your wife?" asked the Infante, pointing to the Genius of Spain in the painting.

"Yes, Your Highness."

"How pleasant! Tell her that whenever I pass the picture I shall stop and look at her."

But Pieter did not deliver this message. He often wondered whether he would go on playing his self-imposed role until he died. He still longed for Helen's soft arms but found a wild pleasure in suppressing his desire daily. He wanted to grow old in peace, having achieved the end of all desire.

Early in March their child was born—Helen's fourth. It was a boy, and Pieter told the mother curtly that he had chosen Philip's son for godfather. The child would be called Pieter Paul. Helen had nothing to say, and their life went on unchanged.

One day in the spring Pieter was looking for a book after supper and was just making for his own room. They were alone in the dining chamber and Helen said suddenly:

"Forgive me for bothering you, Pieter, but could you tell me what your plans are about Steen this year? There are a hundred different things to be settled."

"We're not going to Steen this year. I can't take the whole studio with me, and the work for the King is very urgent." He hesitated, but added: "I wish we had never gone to Steen."

Helen was very clever. She did not show any eagerness to continue the conversation; she replied quietly:

"Yes, I have had the same thought a hundred times. I wish we had never gone to Steen."

She turned away without another word. Pieter saw her maneuver clearly, but he was not able to go on suppressing the thoughts which had seethed so bitterly in his mind for the past six months.

"It wasn't Steen," he said. "What happened there would have happened here in Antwerp, too. There are women who don't know that marriage demands sacrifices on both sides."

"But now I do know. I have paid a very painful price to learn it."

"It's too late now."

"It's easy for you, Pieter, to say that. You have your work and can forget everything in it. But I spend my time brooding—and I think it would have been better for me to die. If it wasn't for the children, I would have killed myself long ago. Who would miss me? I am only a burden to you—and a burden to myself. What sort of a life is this: to suffer the whole day long waiting for something which will never come? But I am bearing my punishment . . . my unjust punishment."

"Unjust? I am amazed at you. For weeks you were kissing a stranger behind my back! You confessed to yourself that you deceived me in your thoughts and would have done it in fact if I had not caught you. Do you consider your punishment unjust? Not to mention that it's a punishment for me as well as for you."

"Yes, Pieter. It would not have been unjust then, because I was careless, vain, and stupid. But now I have come to my senses; I am a good mother and I love my husband. Or rather I would love him if he would let me. But why do you say that this is a punishment for you as well as for me?"

"Because I love you, Helen. I still desire you madly. I am piling torments on myself, and when I writhe in anguish I tell myself: go on, suffer, you dog."

"But why should you suffer? What sin have you committed?"

"I tell you, I loved life and joy and beauty too much. I went on trying to grab what was no longer my due. I degraded myself with jealousy,

made myself ridiculous in the eyes of a ne'er-do-well young coxcomb—and I ruined a lovely young girl by chaining her to an old man. And my sin is irreparable—for we cannot separate, because of the children.”

“That’s all untrue. You didn’t make yourself ridiculous; that ne’er-do-well young coxcomb can despise me as I deserve, but you he must respect. And why should we stay apart if you love me still? I am in love with you—as I have never been before. If you want to punish me, all right. But why punish yourself?”

Pieter was silent. He was deeply amazed to hear Helen speak like a mature and serious woman. Her evident remorse touched him. But he stayed stubbornly silent.

“Tell me, Pieter,” Helen asked, very softly, “will you never want me again? Once, in a long time . . . never?”

“I don’t know,” he answered, in an even lower voice. “I don’t know now. Perhaps. In time. . . .”

When he was undressed and trying to read, he noticed that only his eye was following the lines, not his brain. He put down the book and began to ponder his life and fate. What was the right decision to come to? Public opinion had completely accepted his marriage as happy and contented. Albrecht was the only one who thought differently—but Bella’s memory made Albrecht biased. He was not an impartial judge. Everybody considered the marriage perfect, even Helen—only he himself did not. What wicked confusion of feelings and thoughts was this? Why should he have wasted six loveless months out of his declining years? He, the lover of life. . . .

His door opened softly. Helen entered dressed in nothing but a fur-lined black little wrap. One rounded knee peeped from it and one full breast also showed. She just stood and waited, with closed eyes, and the tears slowly coursed down her cheeks.

“Helen!” Pieter cried. The next moment they were in each other’s arms, their lips searching each other’s in stormy desire.

“Oh Pieter,” she whispered, “how you crush me . . . how strong you are. . . . Pieter, you must believe me, I adore you . . . now everything will be different. Pieter. . . . Do you love me?”

“I hate you . . . but I am mad for you. . . .”

Later she fell asleep in exhausted happiness. He laughed in the dark-

ness like a madman and told himself triumphantly what he had told himself with bitter grief a few hours earlier:

"Sixty . . . I am sixty now."

Next morning everything was different. They looked at each other as they did after their wedding night.

"Pieter," Helen asked, nestling against him, "Won't you come back to our bedroom?"

"No, sweet. The servants would notice that we have quarreled and made it up again. Let us stay this way—as if we had a clandestine affair. You can slip into my room as if you were my mistress. Provided you like to slip into my room. . . ."

"Oh, you wicked man, you know I can't live without you. . . ."

"Just as I cannot live without you."

This time their happiness was deep and lasting. At the wedding of Teniers and Anna Breughel they both felt as if they were celebrating their own resurrected love.

But at the same time work went on in the studio. Yet even at the height of pressure he found time to paint Helen, the model he had missed for six months. He painted a new portrait of her, an amorous caprice of his imagination; he painted a shepherd attacking with eager desire his lovely fair-haired mate. This picture approached pornography in its frank sensuality. He did not intend it for the public; it was placed in Helen's room.

But the paintings of the Parada series also progressed. The ten painters worked through the summer of 1637 without respite, and continued their toil into the autumn. Meanwhile the troubles of the outside world went on. In Scotland a religious war had begun. Richelieu reconciled Louis XIII and his wife, who had not been on speaking terms for years. Bishop Ophoven, for many years Pieter's intimate friend and confessor, died. Peiresc, his friend of forty years' standing, died at his castle in Provence before Albrecht could visit him. The old companions of his life were passing away one after the other; and, while he grieved for them, he thought sadly that sooner or later it would be his turn. Nothing lessened, however, the wild flame of his desire for Helen.

During the autumn the Infante paid another visit, expressing his disapproval of the slow progress of the artists and again paying court to Helen. But his flattering interest only increased the love between wife and husband, heightened and colored their stormy love-making. At last on

January 24, 1638, Pieter finished the hundred-and-twelfth picture. He sent an express courier to Brussels to announce that the series was finished. Fernando appeared two days later in Antwerp. He said he wanted to be present at the packing.

"Your Highness, it's impossible to pack them yet. Many of them are not yet dry."

"It doesn't matter, they can dry on the way."

"Impossible. You cannot pack wet paintings, Your Highness. They would be ruined. We must wait."

"All right, I'll give you three days."

"That won't be sufficient; the sun's not strong enough. We need six weeks, Your Highness, not three days. The earliest date the pictures can be dispatched is the tenth of March. The earliest they can reach Madrid is sometime in April."

"This *is* annoying. But you know more about it, so I must accept your opinion. May I be allowed to salute Doña Helena?"

"You will make her most happy, Your Highness."

"I suppose she is again expecting a baby?"

"Not at present, Your Highness. This happens to be one of the rare occasions when she isn't."

They went up to Helen. The Infante complimented her freely and made some rather lewd jokes. Pieter began to find this interest in his wife a little annoying. But he was resolved to defend her with tooth and claw if necessary. The Infante suggested that Helen's lovely figure might have given her a place on Olympus as one of the Three Graces.

"An excellent idea, Your Highness. I shall paint my wife as one of the Three Graces—or why not all three?"

Fernando gazed at Helen and swallowed hard.

"Will you show me the picture when it's finished?"

"I shall be most happy, Your Highness."

Pieter started it next day, up in his private rooms, behind locked doors.

"If that young rake is so curious, I'll show him how lovely you are."

"Oh, don't abuse him, he's a very pleasant man."

Pieter himself was enchanted by the finished picture. Helen represented for him all the lovely women in the world.

The pictures he had dispatched abroad had reached their destination safely. The Whitehall panels were on the way for months, as they were

held up again and again. But at last King Charles was able to view them in Whitehall. His finances had probably recovered, for he not only sent a considerable sum to reduce his outstanding debt, but also a finely wrought, heavy gold chain as an additional expression of his pleasure. It weighed eighty-two and a half ounces and was added to the gold and silver objects in the Rubens treasury. The hundred and twelve Parada pictures also reached Madrid. But these brought no golden chain, only a new commission—just at a time when Pieter was again attacked by gout. This year he was happily prepared to go to Steen, deciding not to take any collaborators and even close down the Antwerp studio. Helen in great excitement was busy compiling a long list of guests. They had started to pack when he was once more laid low by gout.

The attack lasted for weeks. When they had quarreled, Pieter had used his gout as an official excuse for moving into a separate bedroom. Now, for the same reason, he longed to quit it. Helen nursed him with great affection. When the Infante arrived with the King's new commission, she was sitting by his bedside.

"His Majesty is well satisfied," Fernando said. "But it has been discovered that there is need of twenty-four more pictures. Paint eighteen yourself. Snijders should do six—all hunting scenes. You will get an extra ten thousand guilders, but the work is urgent."

"Your Highness, I am prostrate and suffering greatly."

"I am deeply sorry, but do try to recover because, as I told you, the work is very urgent. The King would like to see his favorite hunting lodge complete. In any case, send for Snijders and discuss the matter with him. Can I see any of your new work?"

It was evident that the Infante wanted to talk to Helen without the disturbing company of her husband.

"Your interest is most flattering, Your Highness. My wife will be glad to show you the paintings."

The Infante joined Helen with a gleam in his eye. She glanced back from the door and kissed her finger to her husband. They stayed away for more than fifteen minutes, but Pieter was calm—he trusted Helen now and loved her more than ever. He knew how they would return: Prince Fernando excited by unsatisfied sensual desire, Helen flushed, with the pleasure of flattered vanity, a somewhat ironic smile on her lips. And

his forecast was right. The Infante took his leave curtly. Helen accompanied him to the door and came back laughing with annoyance.

"What is it, dear, was he very persistent?"

"Very. He said such dirty things that I blushed."

"What?"

"I hope you will let me off repeating them. He said he would not rest until I was nicer to him."

"His Highness is not very chivalrous. He exploits the fact that your husband is lying ill and helpless. He is just like his brother. He can't see a skirt without losing his head. Helen, I have had enough of this, the humility of a loyal subject has its limits. I'll teach him not to call here any more. . . ."

"Pieter, don't. . . ." Helen interrupted. "He is such a pleasant man . . . and why shouldn't the Governor pay court to me so long as I keep it innocent? I thought of inviting him to Steen; perhaps he would accept. It might be useful to you, too."

"I am sure he would accept, my dear, but it wouldn't be useful to me. I'd be sent to prison for lese majesty. He would besiege you mercilessly, and I . . . I would speak out frankly. It is better, dear, to stop his coming."

Helen looked rather dismayed.

"But, if his visits cease suddenly, my reputation will suffer. What will they say in town if he stops coming?"

"In town? You speak strangely. All they know in town is that he called here once or twice because of the King's great commission. When the pictures are finished, he won't come any more, because our business will be done. Everybody will think it natural."

"You are mistaken. The town is full of rumors about his fancy for me. We are the only family he visits in Antwerp. All the noble ladies are burning with envy. If he stays away suddenly, they'll laugh at me."

Pieter was so startled that he wanted to sit up, but he had forgotten his gout and had to fall back with a loud groan.

"A fine thing!" he cried. "They have been coupling your name already with the Infante—and making a fool of me! Is this how you regard the honor of my name? I am furious, and I don't want to see you. Leave me alone now."

Helen went out silently and defiantly. They had quarreled again. But this misunderstanding did not last six months—only until the same eve-

ning. Pieter was left alone to brood, racked with pain. He soon found his anger unreasonable. What woman would not be flattered if the head of the state paid court to her? Helen's fundamental characteristic was vanity—after all, she was a woman. A gentle soul like Bella who had no trace of vanity was one in a million. It would be unjust to compare Helen who, in spite of her four children, was only twenty-four and very naïve, with Bella. Human weakness must be understood and wisely forgiven. After all, he was to blame because he had behaved tactlessly. He should not have told Helen anything, but simply poured cold water—tactfully but decisively—on the Infante's interest. And that was what he would do. In the evening he sent for Helen.

"Look, Helen, I have been so happy since we made up our quarrel—let us not start it again. We won't talk any more about the Infante. We can't invite him to Steen, as rumor would accuse us of all sorts of ulterior motives. If he comes here, let him come; you can discourage his attentions if they become too pressing."

"You see, Pieter, how nice you can be if you want to. You are the kindest man in the world. Is your leg hurting badly, my poor darling?"

"It's still painful, but I think it's getting better. Perhaps we can go to Steen next week."

He had a new pupil now whom he had grown to love almost as much as Van Dyck, a twenty-year-old Mechlin sculptor called Lucas Faidherbe. He had brought some samples of his work; he liked best to work in ivory but he could not afford it. Petel, who could not stay long in any place, had once more left Antwerp, and Pieter found his successor in this young boy. Faidherbe possessed not only exceptional talent but also a most likable character. It was a great joy to work with him. Pieter brought out an old painting showing a bacchanal, and made a drawing from it to serve as a model for an ivory cup. There was a nymph on it, a satyr, and a small boy misbehaving in an amusing manner. Faidherbe carved the cup, and it was a masterpiece.

The young man lived in the house and became, without being asked, a sort of steward. He was the one who went to bed last, examining doors and windows, keeping count of fuel, paint, canvas, brushes, taking care of the pictures in the storerooms. Whenever Pieter thought of something which could be done, he discovered that Faidherbe had already seen to it. Soon he became indispensable. Pieter made his position "official" and paid

him a separate salary. When he was able to go to Steen at last, he left the house and studio in Faidherbe's care, after giving all his collaborators a vacation—a thing he had never done before. Faidherbe, too, planned to pay a short visit to Mechlin, as he was in love with a young girl there and wanted to marry her as soon as possible.

It was almost August by the time they reached Steen. Helen had invited only the family. The first days were spent in pleasant serenity. Pieter worked diligently at the pictures for the King, but he had also other work: the crucifixion of St. Peter. It was a commission from a rich Cologne merchant, and Pieter had great trouble with his model—one of the farmhands—who had to be bribed into enduring being fastened head down on a wooden cross and remaining there for a sufficiently long time.

But after the peace of these first days life became livelier. The people of Mechlin and the neighborhood discovered that the Rubens family was in residence at Steen. The visitors came without invitation, and they could not be turned away. In a week the castle and its grounds were again seething with guests; excursions were organized to the Dyle, the little wood, the inns of Eppeghem. Nicolaas played the host now. He was twenty years old, his mustache and beard had grown, he was courting three ladies at the same time, swearing to each of them eternal love. And one Sunday afternoon the Mechlin musicians started to play again in front of the castle.

Pieter was sitting and reading in his studio; he joined his guests only late in the afternoon, resigning himself wisely to the fact that Helen wanted to amuse herself. He was no longer jealous. Every evening his wife accounted for every minute of her day, and Brocke was never among the guests. Pieter was no longer suspicious or watchful. He preferred to be peaceful and trusting. He had come to the conclusion that no woman could be guarded. One could only love her and believe her. . . .

But he, too, had his visitors: Teniers and Faidherbe. Pieter received them cordially. They went to the studio to look at the pictures. His last work was on the easel; a Madonna with the Infant Jesus and several saints. The Madonna sat enthroned, holding Jesus in her lap. St. Jerome was kneeling at her side, and behind a group of female saints St. George in armor held up a flag.

"I have just noticed," Teniers said, "this St. George is a self-portrait."

"Yes. The first of these saints is Isabella Brant, my first wife. The

Madonna is Helen, as you see—the Child my youngest son. Pieter Paul.”

“This is one of your finest paintings, master. For what purpose did you paint it?”

“To be hung over my grave.”

“Don’t say such a thing, master. You are only joking. It is much too early to talk of your grave.”

“I shouldn’t care to die tomorrow,” Pieter replied jovially. “But it’s never too early to prepare for death. I hope you have a pleasant time downstairs.”

Both guests started to praise the hospitality of Steen. Music came from the garden, and the whole summery world seemed happy and contented.

X

Old Brant was unable to forget politics. Whenever he came for a little talk during the long winter afternoons when Pieter had been unable to work, he always had plenty of news. Now he related that the reconciliation of the French royal couple had proved permanent. At long last a Dauphin was born. The whole of France was jubilant, and the child was baptized Louis. If he survived and followed his father, he would be called Louis XIV. The cause of the Queen Mother seemed to be lost. Maria Medici was now staying in London; at one time the richest woman in Europe, she had lost all her property and was dependent on the charity of her son-in-law. Brant followed up his news with lengthy deductions concerning the repercussions on international policy. But he noticed that Pieter was paying scant attention.

"What's the matter, Pieter? At one time you would have been much excited by these things."

"Yes, but nowadays I think of other matters. Of Pieter Breughel, who has followed his brother into the grave—he no longer paints hell with yellow, red, and greenish flames. And old Snellincks is dead, too. I saw one of his altarpieces in the Romuald Church at Mechlin. He was an old-fashioned man, given to using too light and cold colors. . . ."

"Why are you tormenting yourself? Pieter Breughel was sixty-nine when he died. Snellincks ninety-four. You are little more than sixty-one. I am much older than you, and yet I never think of death. Let's talk about something else. What's Albrecht's news?"

"He is slowly starting on his return journey. I am curious to hear what he has decided about his marriage."

"You can be sure of those two, Pieter. The other day I visited the Van der Monts and had a short talk with the girl. She is a really charming creature."

"I like her, too. What did she say?"

"They had agreed not to correspond. But she is steady in her feelings

as I have found few young girls to be. She says either she marries Albrecht or no one—and she is sure of him. . . . What's Nicolaas doing?"

"The rascal!" Pieter said, his face brightening. "He's chasing girls and doesn't want to study. But there's no need for anxiety about him. He has a wonderful head for business. He could outwit any Jew or Levantine. But I shouldn't recommend him as a son-in-law to anyone. He'll be a philanderer all his life."

"Strange. Where did he inherit that? His mother was the most virtuous woman in the world, and you were a model husband!"

"I think he inherited it from me. I was a model husband and I still am, but only because I have disciplined myself ever since I was a child. I have more sensuality than ten other men put together. But I have thrown it all into my profession. I still think that I was right. You can only live if you economize in life. It isn't easy, I know. And I have always been a lover of life."

"You can love life," old Brant answered, "however old you are; you can always find some pleasure. Mine is reading and eating. You, too, will find that compensation when you're eighty."

"I don't want it," Pieter shook his head. "I cannot imagine life without love and work. And I don't want to miss either of these two while I am alive."

"I am surprised, Pieter, to hear you say such things. I know you to be a most moderate, sober man. But, if you say so, I am sure you mean it. And, frankly, you startle me."

"No need to be startled," Pieter laughed. "I am happily married, and I work a great deal."

Now he was painting the Judgment of Paris for the Parada series. The three goddesses were again replicas of Helen. The whole painting was nothing but a declaration of love before the whole world, with the eternal shamelessness of art: look at this naked body, admire it, and know that this is my mate; admire it, and understand why I am so much in love with her!

This painting was to be one of the main Parada pictures, and it was much larger than the others. King Philip was so interested in the sketch that he demanded the finished work most urgently. Fernando himself came over to Antwerp about it. By that time the Judgment of Paris was drying in the studio.

"Fine," the Infante said, "but I think there's too much nudity about it."

"That is the real merit of the picture, Your Highness. Paris would hardly have passed judgment on fully dressed goddesses. I was rather sorry that I had to yield to tradition and cover up the hips of two of them with draperies."

"So you don't think this nudity should be covered up?"

"Oh no, Your Highness."

"All right, the King can form his own opinion. This Venus seems to resemble Doña Helena."

"She was the model for all three, Your Highness. She will be really sorry not to have been able to greet Your Highness, but she is indisposed and in bed. . . . And she feels that it would be most unfitting for her to receive Your Highness in her bedroom. . . ."

"Well, I must say that if this picture . . ." the Infante began.

"This isn't my wife, Your Highness. It's a model. Art and social intercourse are utterly different. Doña Helena has to consider her position as the wife of a nobleman, a knight of England, a *caballero* of Spain, an ambassador extraordinary, doctor *honoris causa* of Cambridge, and the Court Counsellor of His Majesty. Precisely toward Your Highness she has to be most careful in preserving the right etiquette. . . ."

Fernando glanced at the court painter, a little startled. His faint blush showed that he understood the hint.

"Then, of course, I cannot disturb her. I only hope that I will be allowed to pay my respects to her the next time."

"I am afraid, Your Highness, that my poor wife's indisposition may be lasting. Nowadays she ails a great deal. But none the less I hope that my studio will be honored soon by a visit from Your Highness."

"Of course, of course. Whenever we have business to do."

At lunch Pieter told his wife that Fernando had once more visited him.

"And he didn't come upstairs?" she asked, disappointed.

"Probably he was in a hurry. The main thing is that he was here and the whole town knows it."

From now on the Infante wrote letters about the pictures, instead of calling in person. There were still a good many unpainted. But Pieter had many other commissions. A Countess Martinitz wrote from Prague that she wanted two Rubens altarpieces for the St. Thomas Church in the Bohemian capital. From Madrid he was asked to paint a picture for

the Flemish Hospital, the subject being the martyrdom of St. Andrew. The Grand Duke of Florence wrote that he wanted a Rubens painting; he left the subject to the artist. Pieter selected a canvas which he called *The Horrors of War*.

He had plenty of work, but his health was not of the best. Gout attacked him with great violence during this winter; he spent more time in bed than out of it. He tried to get used to working seated, but he found this very difficult. Nor did the weather favor him: the winter was damp and sunless, the streets wet and windy. Now he felt the smallest change in the weather. But he did not complain; he lay patiently in bed and waited for his recovery.

"I'll be better," he said, "as soon as Albrecht arrives."

He was awaiting his son impatiently and pondered for long hours how much he should disclose to him of the intimate secrets of his married life. There was no doubt that the boy considered Helen a light woman. He never sent greetings to her in his letters. He often wrote to his grandfather, and Pieter exchanged the letters he received for those addressed to old Brant, but Albrecht was rather vague about his future intentions. Pieter even feared that he would not come to Antwerp at all but stay in Brussels. On the other hand, Albrecht's future wife was living in Antwerp. But what could he tell him when he came home? What would Albrecht's attitude be to Helen? The invalid was brooding over all this and could not find a solution.

At last one evening Albrecht arrived. His face was bronzed, his mustache and beard were manly. When he sat down at the edge of Pieter's bed and questioned him with anxious affection about his health, they were alone—Helen had gone to visit her mother. After the first sentences, Pieter came to the point.

"My son, before you tell me of your travels, we must clear up something. We are grown men, we can talk frankly. I know all about what happened in Steen. You caught Helen kissing a stranger. You didn't tell me anything."

"I felt, Father, that I had no right to do so."

"I understand. You didn't want to cause me grief. You must know that Helen has confessed everything to me. You know me—I am not a credulous man. Helen has been childishly careless but never dishonorable. She has deeply regretted her immature and silly coquetry. She has not sullied

my name, she is a fitting mistress of my house, kind and affectionate to Nicolaas. Does this suffice for you?"

"No, Father. I want to know one thing: does she make you happy?"

"Very happy, my boy. Of course no one can take the place in my heart of your perfect and beloved mother. But I am old, ailing, and often in pain. She is the joy of my old age, and I feel infinite gratitude toward her."

"Thank you, Father. I'll do everything to keep her from regarding me as a stranger in her house until I get married myself."

"Thank God—that's just the answer I expected from you. Have you decided about your bride?"

"I have, Father. I still feel the same about her. And, though we haven't written to each other, I am convinced that she will say the same thing."

"I can tell you now that she will. At least that's what she said to your grandfather. . . . Come now, tell me all about your trip. . . . Start right at the beginning."

Albrecht began to talk. They soon warmed to their conversation; they did not observe it when Helen entered. Both suddenly realized her presence; she faced them in terrible embarrassment because she could not slip out unnoticed, and she did not know how to meet Albrecht. But the young man jumped to his feet and kissed her hand.

"Helen, I am deeply grateful to hear from Father what a good and self-sacrificing wife you are, and how happy you make him. I want to thank you with all my heart. And now I have come to stay in Antwerp for good. I expect you to decide where I shall go. I could live with my grandfather or with my aunt, or here. Whatever you tell me, I shall gratefully accept."

Helen listened to his words like a prisoner expecting the worst, and hearing her acquittal. At first she could not speak, for sobs choked her. Albrecht went to her and took her in his arms. She leaned her head on his broad shoulder and burst into tears of happiness.

"Albrecht. . . . I. . . . I should like you to stay here with us. . . ."

"Thank you, Helen. Don't cry, I'll stay. Is Nicolaas at home?"

"No, he is at your grandfather's."

"Could I ask you to send him a message? Let him bring Grandfather along, too. In the meantime, might I look at the little ones?"

Pieter had not hoped for such happiness. At the bottom of his soul he

felt a deep humility and respect toward his son. When Brant left in the evening, the boys retired, and he remained alone with Helen, who was in raptures about the way Albrecht had changed. Pieter wanted to tell her that it was she who had changed and that Albrecht had always been manly, warm-hearted, and noble. But he did not. He spoke rather of Steen, the tardy spring, the fine days they would spend there. They would invite the Van der Monts, Pieter would paint, Albrecht could play the host. . . .

Spring came late and was not a real spring even then. One rainy day followed the other. If Pieter succeeded in spending ten days consecutively out of bed, he counted himself lucky. It was still rainy when at last they dared to risk the move to Steen. The studio was closed. Faidherbe went back to Mechlin, where he wanted to settle, now that his fame had been established by his apprenticeship in the Rubens studio.

Pieter had to take to his bed again in Steen. The castle seemed suddenly changed. It had been a sunny, smiling, gay home. Now it was damp and stuffy. The long, wet winter had permeated the walls with chill moisture. Pieter was always cold; one evening in July he had to have a fire lit in his room. Every day they went to sleep with the hope that summer would come by next morning. Yet, whenever the sun shone for a little while, clouds soon rolled up again. The invalid lay fidgeting in bed and listening to the thunder which heralded not a mere thunderstorm but a long and stubborn upheaval of the heavens. Thus August brought the news that the swallows had left, the first occasion he could remember of their departing so early in the year. Pieter decided to return to Antwerp. He was unable to rest in Steen.

In the town they were met by the news of Brant's illness. Pieter felt a little better and dragged himself to the sickbed of his father-in-law. The old man was feverish and complained of pains in his chest. He was very weak and found it difficult to talk, but his doctor was hopeful of his recovery. His daughter, Mevrouw Fourment, and Philips's widow nursed him. Albrecht and Nicolaas called twice every day. In the last days of August, Pieter was once more attacked by gout. And in the evening the boys brought the sad news that their grandfather had died. Pieter was unable to go to the funeral; it took him two weeks to get over the attack. His first call was on the public notary, for old Brant's death had created new financial problems. His estate was bequeathed partly to Pieter, partly

to Bella's two sons. So Pieter had to add a codicil to his own will, to enable all six of his children to have equal shares.

His health improved suddenly. His hands had recently been attacked by gout; his fingers had swollen painfully, and the joints began to get gnarled and crooked. This passed off, however, and with it the fear that he would be unable to work. Although the joints of his fingers had somewhat thickened, he was still able to use the brush. He started work with greedy zest. There were still thirteen pictures to be finished, three of them of large proportions.

One day he had an unexpected visitor—Gerbier. They had been very good friends once upon a time. In London he had stayed with him and spent many pleasant evenings talking. And yet the visit struck a chill to his heart. This Gerbier had received in his lodgings at The Hague the Flemish noblemen conspiring against Spanish rule, and had taken part in secret negotiations at the time of the Aarschot trouble. Then he had betrayed them—for blood money. It would have been different had he done it out of political conviction, without reward. Many good Flemish patriots thought Flanders too small to stand alone and that she was best serving her own interests in placing herself under the protection of Spain. During the decades of his diplomatic activity Pieter, too, had clung to this conviction. Nor could he find fault with the fact that the haughty and dangerous Duke Aarschot had been put out of action. But this Gerbier was Flemish, he had trapped his own compatriots, betrayed his own fellow countrymen for money. All this flitted through Pieter's mind while Gerbier greeted him. Yet he tried to be a polite host.

"This is a surprise! What has brought you to Antwerp?"

"I have again entered the diplomatic service," Gerbier replied. "Perhaps it may surprise you, but King Charles has appointed me English Resident at Brussels."

"Really? So you now represent England in Flanders?"

"Yes, I have a family and must earn my living. I enjoy the work in any case. I was sorry that you did not come to The Hague all those years ago. You would have achieved something. Aarschot and his associates could not make any headway."

"Especially after you had foiled their intentions."

"Yes, those were my instructions. It was not in England's interest that her ally, Spain, should be troubled by movements of independence. That

was why I had to denounce Aarschot and his associates. It was a difficult but successful stroke of policy. Nor did it go unrewarded—and, after all, it was extremely useful to the late Archduchess. I hear that you have completely retired from politics.”

“That’s true. I live only for painting now.”

“A pity. Or rather, not a pity from your point of view, as you can earn as much as you want. But it must be a costly luxury for Olivarez to do without you. His policy has failed completely. He is unable to check Holland on the sea; he will lose the Indies. There is a dangerous separatist movement in Catalonia; that, too, will go. Portugal is on the verge of revolt; the Braganza family is very strong, and Spain will lose that province next. Spain is falling to pieces, and Richelieu goes from strength to strength. Isn’t that how you see things here?”

“I don’t know. For years I haven’t discussed politics with anyone. I am no longer well informed.”

“Well, I won’t bore you, then. Let us talk of painting instead. I have just been calling on Jordaens.”

“Really? I hope he’s working hard. I heard that he was very busy.”

“I brought him some new work. Listen. . . . King Charles has decided to do up a new bedchamber for his Queen. He needs nine paintings on the ceiling and thirteen on the walls, and he instructed me to order them from Jordaens. Jordaens told me his terms, but I would like to put the commission in your hands. I’ll tell you what Jordaens asked; and, if you can fix your prices a little lower, I can settle the matter with the King. Jordaens wants six thousand six hundred guilders. How much would you expect?”

Pieter glanced at him. Gerbier’s tactics were rather transparent: he wanted to play off one painter against the other.

“My terms, I am afraid, are higher. I should ask fourteen thousand guilders.”

“What? More than twice as much? Do think it over. Would you care to lose such a commission?”

“I never want cheap commissions. Besides, Jordaens is a colleague and a friend of mine.”

“Just as you wish, of course. But don’t be stubborn. I’ll write to the King and we will see what we can do.”

“How is His Majesty?” Pieter asked to be rid of the painful subject.

"Oh, he's carrying on as usual, but his troubles are increasing. He's very stiff-necked about his decisions. He hates Parliament and Parliament hates him. He may come to a bad end. Horoscopes are all the vogue in London now. We had the King's horoscope cast, and it said that he would die on the scaffold, as his grandmother did. Of course he wasn't told—no one dared to tell him. Do you believe in horoscopes?"

"I believe in astrology but less in horoscopes, because they are usually drawn up by ignorant people. You can certainly read in the stars, but only very great sages can understand their language. Tell me about Van Dyck. He hasn't written to me for a long time."

"Hasn't he? Then you don't even know he was recently married?"

"Really? Who is the bride?"

"An aristocrat, of course—the daughter of Lord Gowrie-Ruthven. His Lordship has been imprisoned in the Tower for some conspiracy and has lost his whole fortune. His daughter is related to the royal family but has no property at all. She is a pleasant and handsome but insignificant woman. Van Dyck is going to Paris; Louis XIII is building a new gallery in the Louvre and has commissioned him to decorate it with paintings."

"Well, I am glad to hear that he is doing well."

"Yes, financially, but he is very tired, almost worn out. He has been indulging himself to excess both in love and wine, burning the candle at both ends. Now he is beginning to show his weariness even in his painting."

"My poor, dear friend. He has got what he wanted of fate: a short but glorious life. . . . What about our other friends?"

They had a long talk, but a certain constraint persisted. And in the end Gerbier left without being able to settle anything about the pictures for the Queen's bedroom.

In March, Pieter's health once more began to fail. Now both of his hands were attacked by gout. Every joint of every finger ached, and one day he found he was unable to hold the brush. The ten smaller pictures for the Parada series were finished, but three larger ones were still lacking. He stared in horror at his hands. He tried to bend his fingers but had to give up the attempt as it caused insufferable pain. He sent for a doctor, choosing at random from among the Flemish physicians a man called Daepe, who was overcome by the honor of attending such a

celebrity. But, though the doctor prescribed unguents, potions, and various brews, he was unable to help and finally confessed the limitations of his knowledge. Pieter now sent for a Walloon doctor named Henri. This man prescribed other things, but insisted that the most important thing was to pray for good weather, because the warm sun might cure the invalid's stiffened hands or at least check the wicked process of paralysis.

Pieter had to give up painting completely. He became more or less helpless in his armchair. Eating caused him the greatest pain, for he insisted on holding fork or spoon and would not allow others to feed him. He was unable to read alone as he could not hold the book. But he endured pain and discomfort patiently, waiting for the strong sun to hasten his recovery. Helen behaved wonderfully in these difficult days; she never went out but sat by his side, reading to him or writing his letters. Sometimes she was relieved by Albrecht or Nicolaas, for Pieter still had plenty of correspondence. Jordaens had called on him, asking him to take over part of King Charles's commission as he was unable to do it alone. Pieter agreed to do three of the many pictures, but told his friend that he could not guarantee any delivery date.

Some time previously an Englishman called Norgate had visited him. They had discussed painting, for Norgate had traveled far afield and knew a great deal about art. He was especially warm in praise of a young Dutch artist called Rembrandt, of whom Pieter had heard already from others. A few weeks after Norgate left, Gerbier wrote from Brussels that the Englishman had been received in audience by King Charles and had praised so much one of Pieter's pictures of the Escorial that the King of England wanted to buy it at any price. Pieter replied that the picture was none of his; it had been executed by a rather mediocre painter, Verhult, after a chalk sketch of his. But even so Gerbier insisted on the purchase, and Pieter sent for Verhult, explaining to him what changes to make in the painting.

Then he had to write to Duquesnoy, the Flemish sculptor living in Rome. He was a very talented, gay artist; his *Manneken Pis* had partly amused, partly outraged a great many people. Pieter considered it a masterpiece, and became a firm friend of Duquesnoy. Now he wrote to him thanking him for some sketches and plaster copies of two small statues which Duquesnoy had sent on from Rome. Next he answered a letter

from Faidherbe, who had announced that his wedding day was already fixed and that he was doing well in Mechlin.

He had many visitors—not only his Antwerp friends, but foreigners passing through the city, who considered it their duty to call at the world-famous studio. They all mentioned the Dutch painter, Rembrandt. Someone said that he was only thirty-three, the son of a well-to-do Leyden miller. He lived in Amsterdam and had recently married. His talent was discovered a few years ago when he painted a lesson in anatomy given by the famous Dr. Tulip for the Amsterdam Surgeons' Guild. They talked a great deal about his pictures but found it difficult to describe them. Some considered him an exceptional artist; others found great faults in his work; he painted in much too dark colors and was far too daring in his light and shadow effects. All this filled Pieter with increasing curiosity. And, as he had heard that Rembrandt was also an etcher, he told Albrecht to look for some specimens of his work in the art dealers' shops—some might have slipped across the frontier.

One day Albrecht arrived with four etchings and placed them in front of Pieter on a small table next to his armchair. He moved them to and fro with his stiff and aching fingers. He discovered the genius in them at once—as one lion of the desert will hear another's roaring even miles away. He felt a violent desire to make the acquaintance of this Dutchman. He would have loved to see the man's pictures, to question him about his philosophy and his artistic ideas. And the longer he examined the etchings, behind the lines of which his expert eye divined the color composition, the greater the unknown artist grew in stature. He was utterly different from him or from Velasquez. It was very difficult to judge an artist from etchings alone, but Pieter was convinced that Rembrandt stood on a level with Velasquez and himself. He sat staring at the etchings and shook his head: incredible.

Food was brought to him, and the etchings had to be put aside. Helen, Albrecht, and Nicolaas came into the room to entertain him during his meal.

"Give me back those etchings," he told them, "when I have finished. One must spend hours over them."

"Is he really a good artist, Father?" Albrecht asked.

"More than that. A genius."

He paused before touching his food.

"Life and death are strange things. Tintoretto died just when I was beginning to paint. When one torch is extinguished, another is kindled at the very same moment. And the new torch takes the place of the old one. That is eternal life. . . ."

XI

Helen was planning to go to Steen to prepare for their summer holidays. May was very beautiful: a happy summer seemed to beckon with the promise of Pieter's recovery. Helen never ceased to encourage her husband. When they were left alone in the darkness, she nestled against him cautiously, so that she should not cause him pain, as if she wanted to transfer to him the youth of her healthy, lovely body.

"Is it still possible to love me?" he whispered with sad gratitude.

"I have never loved you more, Pieter," Helen answered.

And he thought with wise, quiet resignation about the woman he held in his arms. He was sixty-two and a cripple. It was quite impossible that this twenty-six-year-old, beautiful woman should be in love with his ailing body. Yet she pitied him and was gentle to him. She would certainly grieve for him bitterly. But afterward she would find consolation. Someone else would take his place. The Infante was certain to press his suit on the desirable young widow. But he, the dead artist, would know nothing about it. How much time could he count on? Perhaps this one summer in Steen. Perhaps two more summers. Perhaps not even one. If his hands were to grow worse, what use would even one summer be?

But Helen did not go to Steen; she did not dare to leave him alone. On the twenty-first of May the Rubens household woke to the terrible news that the head of the family was paralyzed in both his hands. He was unable to move one of his arms. He had to be fed like a child. They sent for a doctor who ordered hot compresses on both arms up to the shoulders and on one of the legs. When the doctor left, Helen conferred with him outside for a considerable time. She returned looking strangely dismayed. They were alone now.

"Pieter, you must get well. I am pregnant again—the doctor has told me that I cannot be mistaken again."

"Helen," Pieter cried out, while his shoulders quivered with his helpless effort to put his arms round her. "Are you quite sure?"

"I am. It is the second month already. You must get better, Pieter."

"This is marvelous news. I must get well, I know."

Miraculously he recovered considerably the same day and was even better the following one. The whole family was jubilant. Helen wept with happiness. Two doctors called on the invalid every day, and she would not leave his bedside. The boys, too, stayed with him. Sometimes they brought in the little ones to play on the carpet under the eyes of their father. Pieter Paul was three, Isabella five, Frans almost seven, and Clara eight. All four were strong, healthy, and strikingly beautiful children. The great family jubilation lasted six days. On the twenty-seventh of May Pieter woke up in a high fever. The old pain which had lessened was now assailing him with double force. He asked for Albrecht.

"Go and fetch Guyot, the public notary, my son. Don't tell anybody here in the house where you are going."

Albrecht did not answer—but he grew as white as a sheet. A little later he returned with Toussaint Guyot, the public notary, who brought along two of his clerks. Helen also came into the room and when she recognized Guyot, she cried out.

"Helen, keep quiet. I'm in a high fever; any excitement will make it worse. Send for Nicolaas. In the meantime get everything ready, Mynheer. It's not a will I want to dictate, but an inventory of my estate. Albrecht, bring some chairs."

They were rather crowded in the small bedroom.

"You mustn't cry, Helen," Pieter continued. "These are very important matters; they concern your whole life and your children. Take it down, Mynheer. Today Don Pieter Paul Rubens and his wedded wife, Helen Fourment, whom we both know personally, appeared in front of us, in full possession of their sanity and memory, although the above-said Don Pieter Paul Rubens was suffering from an illness, and both declared that they wished to make the following testamental contract detailed in the subsequent points. . . ."

The quill raced over the paper in deathly silence. Pieter dictated slowly and carefully.

"First point. I, Pieter Paul Rubens, declare that the present testamental contract nullifies all my previous last wills and testaments. Second point. The contracting parties declare that they have chosen for their burial place the Church of St. James, that they do not make any stipula-

tion for their funerals, both parties leaving it to the survivor of the two, the executors and the guardians of the minors surviving them. Point three. Of the estate of the party dying first one hundred guilders to the poor of the City of Antwerp. Fourth point. I, Pieter Paul Rubens, declare that I owe to my friend Jacob Moermans a painting and immediately after my death he must be given a finished painting from my estate. Point five. The two contracting parties agree with regard to the books in the library that Mynheer Albrecht Rubens, elder son of Isabella Brant, secretary of His Majesty's Secret Council, should be the only heir of the whole library; after the death of both contracting parties he and his brother Nicolaas should inherit equal shares in the collection of coins and carved stones, excluding the agate vases, the objects of jade, and precious stones. The two brothers can sell these articles only by common consent; and, if any of them contests any point of this contract, he will lose his right of inheritance. . . . ' Mynheer Guyot, you can put in all the legal phraseology. . . . "

"Yes, Your Excellency. Wouldn't you like to rest a little?"

"No, I can go on for a while. 'If I, Pieter Paul Rubens, should die first, I leave to my wife a full child's share of all my mobile and immobile property wherever it is to be found and the following jewels, already in her possession. . . . ' Helen, give the list to Mynheer Guyot; it's in the small iron chest. . . . 'Half of all household property should be inherited by her, while the other half I bequeath to my sons Albrecht and Nicolaas and the children of my second marriage. . . . ' "

Helen burst out crying loudly. Pieter waited a little before he continued:

"I wish that none of my children should be at a disadvantage in dividing my property. But I stipulate that the sons of my first marriage shall each be allowed to buy from their half brothers and sisters one quarter share of my house and estate at Steen for the sum of fifty thousand guilders, thereby acquiring a full half share while the other half should go to my wedded wife. . . . ' "

He disposed of his gold and silver, of his pictures and sketches, in painstaking detail.

"It's your turn now, Helen," he said, "in case you die before me. Don't cry now, this is very important. You must repeat all these clauses in your

own name. Guyot will read aloud what he is writing and you can interrupt him if you have any remark to make. . . ."

"No. . . . there is nothing," said Helen.

The notary repeated the text in a swift monotone. Then he had to read the whole thing once more from beginning to end, together with the usual legal ending and a special paragraph about the inability of Pieter to sign with his own hand. Then the whole thing had to be copied out with the inventories. Albrecht protested twice that this would be too much for his father.

"Don't disturb me, my son," Pieter said. "I haven't much time, I must get it over."

It was late in the afternoon when they finished the work. By that time Henri and Daepe, the doctors, had bled the invalid, but his condition did not improve. When the public notary and his clerks were gone, he asked for a priest. The oil of the last sacrament touched his forehead. He felt an infinite relief. By the time the priest had left, he could only whisper.

"You know how much I have left you all? Four millions. . . ."

And he smiled with satisfaction. Later Albrecht came into the room. Outside there was much subdued noise.

"Father, there are many people here, relatives and friends. Whom do you want to see? Perhaps it would be better if no one. . . ."

"Is Daniel's wife here?"

"Yes."

"Let her come in. And leave me alone with her."

He found it very difficult to talk. Bella's sister came into the room, sobbing. The dying man wanted to tell her many things, but could not speak.

"Kiss me. . . ." was all he could say.

She kissed him and left the room. The strange thing was that, although his lips did not obey his will, his mind was constantly at work. He knew clearly that he was dying, but this idea did not seem desperate or even grim. He found it natural and proper; he only wondered when the war, which had been going on for twenty-two years, would come to an end, and he wished he could live to see the ultimate fate of Flanders. But he knew that these questions of his would remain unanswered. Then suddenly he felt that his bedroom was oppressively small. He decided to

change this. He began to summon his will power to enlarge its space. In this he succeeded with surprising ease. The walls moved by themselves; a little while later the floor vanished—yet he knew that he would not fall. His bed hovered in space, the infinite emptiness of which was filled with drifting figures, at first dim, but growing clearer and clearer. They rolled around him, from all points of the compass, limited by no laws of perspective. He was simultaneously quite close to each of the millions of figures and with each of them discussed different subjects at the same moment. Vorsterman's face appeared—he spoke to him without words but the other man understood him perfectly. This was what he said silently: "You were wrong, Vorsterman; I am a great artist." And at the same time he said to Erica: "You were always true, because beauty is the real truth." And he said something to Bella, too, but the million figures scattered suddenly, the walls of the room closed, a floor appeared underneath his bed, and he saw two men's faces, behind them Helen and his elder sons, who were weeping, and rays of strong sunshine. . . .

"Who are you?" he stammered.

"I am Doctor Lazarus from Brussels, my companion is Doctor Spinola. His Highness Prince Fernando sent us, Your Excellency. We must operate on your open wound which will be rather painful, but it will soon be over."

The face bending over him had a nose with a queer bridge and somewhat astigmatic eyes. He sketched it quickly in his imagination. Then he glanced at his right leg. The flesh was open on his badly swollen knee. It was a gaping wound, with vivid colors. But he was no longer interested in them. His eyes closed. He commanded the walls to vanish once more. They disappeared immediately. Bella's face appeared again. He gave himself up with happy calmness to watching that beloved face. It spoke now, the same words she spoke before she died. This face began to grow suddenly and became so huge that its eyes filled his whole horizon. . . . then only a part of the eyeballs. . . . Then it vanished and he began to fall. . . . but his fall was really a rising, a flying, and he felt that he had lost himself.

He really died at that moment. Those who surrounded him and cried did not know this. Only at noon on the thirtieth day of May did Albrecht say, pressing his ear to his chest and listening in vain for a heartbeat:

"He is dead. . . ."

